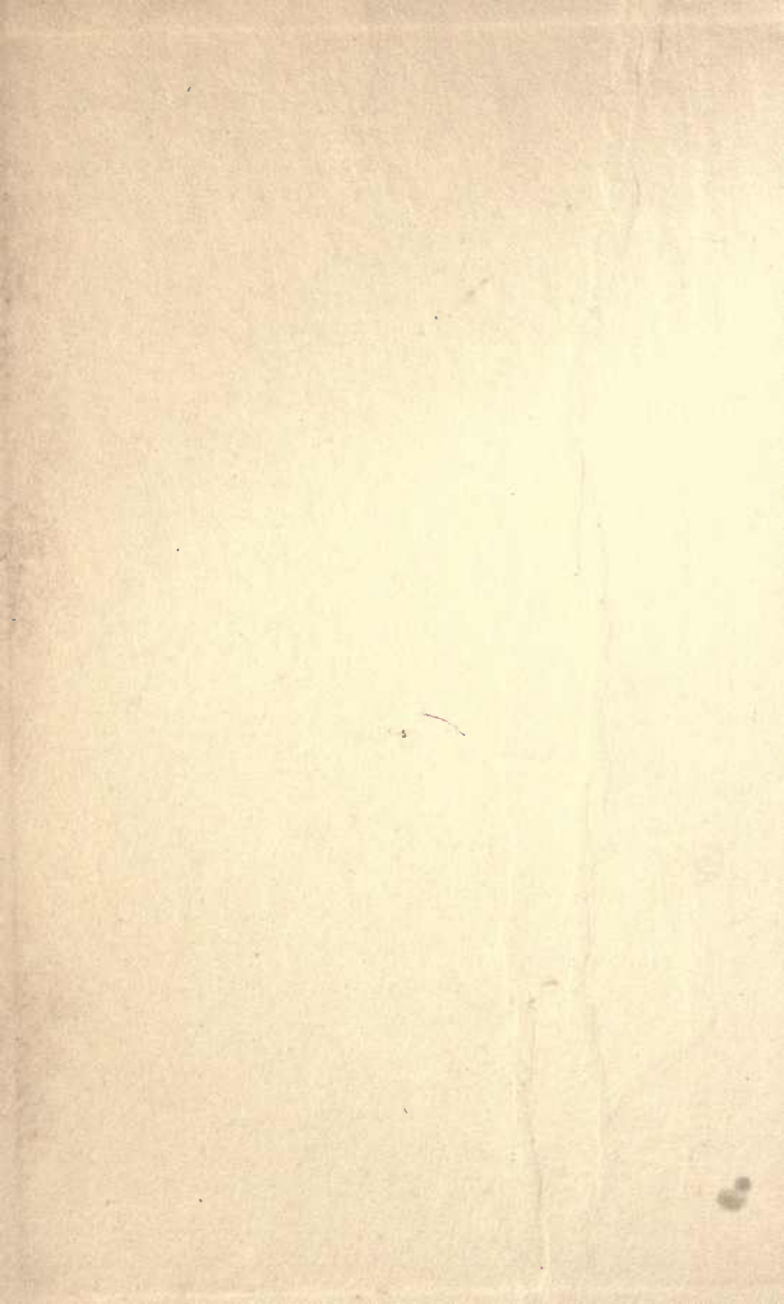


The
MARRIAGE
of
PATRICIA
PEPPERDAY

GRACE MILLER WHITE



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PATRICIA PEPPERDAY

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By Grace Miller White

STORM COUNTRY POLLY

THE MARRIAGE OF PATRICIA
PEPPERDAY



A third time she attempted to speak, but her cramped throat refused to make audible sound.

FRONTISPIECE. *See page 317.*

THE MARRIAGE OF PATRICIA PEPPERDAY

BY
GRACE MILLER WHITE

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY
RALPH P. COLEMAN



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TO
MY LITTLE FRIEND
JOE SCOTT

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THE MARRIAGE OF
PATRICIA PEPPERDAY

THE MARRIAGE OF PATRICIA PEPPERDAY

CHAPTER I

IF, by chance, a stranger addressed Adelina Pepperday as "Mrs. Pepperday," she was accustomed to explain with a smile illuminating her face: "Miss Pepperday — by choice, thank you!"

There was a good reason for this "by choice," so Adelina's friends averred, for many of them remembered that a certain young man had left Balmville with a hang-dog air after Madison Pepperday's eighteen-year-old sister had broken off her engagement with him. The ins and outs of the disrupted betrothal were known to none but Adelina and the swain she had dismissed.

Men were out of her life forever, she told herself, as often as she allowed her mind to dwell upon the masculine sex.

The old-fashioned Pepperday homestead on Blackberry Lane in Balmville, a suburb of Newburgh on the Hudson, was Adelina's home. She lived there "by choice" also, as she had often reiterated. Her brother, Madison, after he had taken for his wife Charlotte Rushmore, purchased a handsome residence of his own a mile or so distant, and he never ceased his efforts to persuade his sister to join his family circle as a permanent member.

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"No house big enough for two families, Mat, dear," was her reply each time the subject was broached. "The place where my father and mother lived and which they left to me when they died, is good enough for me. I intend to be an old maid, anyway."

One day, a year or so following Madison's marriage, Adelina in astounded wonderment, gazed down upon three sleeping infants who were snuggled together like newly born kittens.

"Here they all are, Aunt Addie," Madison said, grinning, "two boys and one girl — Barney, Michael and Patricia Pepperday! Newburgh will open her eyes when they grow up, by Jove. Touch 'em, Addie! They won't bite you."

And Adelina, extremely perturbed, touched them. First she laid her finger against Barney's soft cheek, but he slept through the ordeal as if he did not mind it in the least.

"Touch the rest, Addie. The middle one is a girl! She's a wee bitty like you, sis."

Having discovered that both she and the small boy were intact, she placed a cautious hand on Patricia's dark head. That done, she drew back as if her duty had been well performed.

"Don't show partiality, Auntie," her brother laughingly admonished. "Here's another!"

Then a most unusual thing happened. Large drops of water rolled down Adelina's pretty, smooth cheeks.

"There's such a mess of 'em, Mat!" she sighed.

Nevertheless, by that time having become used to the process, she bravely picked up the third baby's hand. Then she nearly fell over upon him. He had clutched hold of one of her digits with a thumb and four fingers which Aunt Addie could liken only to so many curled leaves of a summer rose. Then Michael

opened his gray eyes and yawned with a mouth no larger than a scarlet button.

With that Adelina's breathing was so interfered with by a great gasp that she fled to the door, but something within herself gave her pause.

"The last one belongs to me," she gulped at her brother. "Tell Charlotte I said so. He's got eyes like mine, and he smiled at me, I hope to goodness if he didn't. He gets my house and what money I leave, when I'm done with 'em, Mat."

That night Aunt Addie swept out the dust that had accumulated in the secret mansion of her heart during the seven years since she had become "Miss Pepperday, by choice," and the three sleeping tenants moved in and took a life lease on the property. But, as she later told herself and made plain to others, Michael Pepperday occupied the star chamber in her soul suite.

She watched with the interest of a mother the babies grow into toddlers, and, during an attack of scarlet fever, she abandoned her own home to hover over the triplets with never-ceasing prayers. When the rash had subsided, she went back to Blackberry Lane with the feeling that of course the neighbors thought her weak and foolish, but she did not give a hang if they did.

Now, nineteen years later, an older although still unusually good looking Adelina was standing at her window, peering out through the pane of glass slightly varnished with frost. Not that her action was of any avail, for the outside world was obscured by a fall of snow, dropping straight down toward the earth.

Earlier in the day the storm had coursed in from the north, crystallizing hoarily the withered stalks of the garden flowers, while each separate branch of the hemlock trees that girded the house was decorated with a peculiar, frosty fluff of white.

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The Pepperday triplets were home for the Christmas holidays, and but a moment since, Adelina's niece, Patricia, had telephoned that she had just returned from New York and had "a bushel of news to tell her."

Anything concerning her cherished children always set Adelina in a flutter, and, because she could not see much further than the end of her shapely nose, she turned from the window with a sigh.

Meanwhile Patricia Pepperday was gliding swiftly over the snow on her skis to unbosom to Aunt Addie the sudden change that now faced her family.

Below the medium height of women by several inches, Patricia was exquisitely if diminutively fashioned, and as straightly erect as the poplar trees that edged the Foster-town road. As she swung along, white teeth gleamed through her smiling lips. From under the narrow brim of her small hat, blue in color, stray curls twisted, raven-black, about her winsome face. Her sand-gray eyes, arched by dark brows and rimmed by sweeping lashes, were sparkling with confidence and high resolve.

A few yards before she reached Blackberry Lane, she paused in an attitude of expectancy. Not that she was fearful, unaccompanied, in the solitary highway, nor was she alarmed at the storm that followed the river on its way to the sea. But at this juncture her heart was going pit-a-pat, the blood in her veins surging in excitement. She was bidding a sort of farewell to the wild land of her childhood, for during her visit to the city she had turned the first sharp corner of her sheltered years. She would soon be enveloped by New York's Broadway with its covered wonders. Out here in the winter silence she longed to relive the emotions called into being in the presence of Martin Brewer, Broadway's eminent playwright. She visualized his kindly smile and smiled herself at the memory.

In his directors' room, Mr. Brewer had said:

"I've in mind a story that will suit you three youngsters down to the ground, but it isn't finished. However, we'll start you in on something else, so you can get to work immediately.

"Sing this bit for me, Miss Pepperday," and she had sung a song of Mr. Brewer's own composition, around which he intended to build a Biblical allegory, so he told her.

Now she hummed it over and spoke the first line of the song aloud:

"There is a River, the Streams whereof shall make Glad the City of God."

How reverently strong ran the beautiful words to the finish!

The City of God! Ignorant of what the metropolis held for her, the innocent Patricia decided that that City was New York, the River was Broadway, — Broadway with its streams of music and laughter and song!

Three days before yesterday she had been a prankish schoolgirl. To-day the City of God had divorced her completely from Vassar, that mighty seat of learning, the *Alma Mater* of her adolescent dreams. Not that she loved Vassar less, but her splendid Pater more.

A cold weather bird in the barren tree above her sounded a weird, short chirp. Patricia flung up her head and in quick response twittered back at him. A small flock of crows passed over Blackberry Lane southward. She smiled after them in gladness of spirit. She laughed aloud as a smart young rabbit bounced across her path, but he was out of sight before she could wish him a "Merry Christmas." God's creatures were loving life as she loved it.

Then she started on the slow climb up Blackberry Lane, to reveal the great news to Aunt Addie.

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"Not going back to school, Patricia!" exclaimed Adelina, aghast. "For mercy's sake, take off your coat and sit down. Tell me all about it while I make you a cup of tea."

The removal of Patricia's fur coat revealed what a mite of a girl she was in spite of her nineteen years.

"The Pater was almost heart-broken," she said, sinking into a chair, "but, as I asked him, what are his children for if not to help him, and you'll see it our way, too, I know!"

While her niece amplified her explanations, Adelina contented herself with exclamations and ejaculations of wonder and sympathy. Her intense interest in the subject matter overcame for the time being her inordinate fondness for verbal comment.

It seemed that Madison Pepperday had become involved in a wild-cat oil scheme at the instigation of a young lawyer by the name of Edward Blake who had a country home just east of Miss Pepperday's farmhouse.

"I thought the Pater looked awfully pale when I got home from college," Patricia went on, "and it took me two hours to wheedle out of him that he had sunk so much money in the wells that he didn't know which way to turn."

"My goodness," interjected Adelina, "it doesn't seem like Mat at all."

"No, it doesn't! Yet, I can see just how father started. He told me all the details. You know how smooth and oily Eddie Blake can be when he likes. Then he's an alderman of New York, and I suppose there's some glamour about that."

"He has no glamour for me," popped in Miss Pepperday.

"And then," continued Patricia, disregarding the inter-

ruption, "when he had the Pater so tangled up he couldn't move, Eddie suggested that he'd advance father what money he needed if—if I'd marry him."

Her cheeks went scarlet as the last words fell from her lips.

Adelina was staring at her, her mouth open.

"The very idea!" she cried. "Why, he's as tall again as you are! You'd break your neck, trying to look at him. He bragged to my hired man just the other day that he stands six feet four and a half inches in his stocking feet."

"I presume he does," agreed Patricia. "His height is nothing against him. I like tall men. But nothing on earth could induce me to marry a man with his principles. And besides that, he drinks too much."

"I know it, dearie, and I'm glad you have the spirit to stand out against him. Nothing you could tell me about him would surprise me a bit. I've just had an experience with him."

"Why, Paddy, one of his barn cats lost its leg in a trap some boy set in my fodder lot not long ago. The poor hurt beast couldn't walk on three legs, so there was nothing for me to do but to bring 'im down here."

"Oh, my," burst in Patricia with sympathy, "have you him yet? May I see him?"

"Of course," nodded Aunt Addie. "He isn't happy anywhere but in my room, so I let him stay up there. I telephoned over to Blake about him, and he talked to me as slick as could be. Said he was very sorry that I should have been bothered—but did he send any one after that cat or come himself as a Christian ought to? No, he didn't, not by a jugful, and the animal is still here and will be the rest of his natural days, if I don't miss my guess. The more I know of Mr. Blake, the better I like his three-legged cat—my cat, I mean."

Now, there's your tea, honey. Sit up to the table and drink it while it is hot."

Her tone melted into tenderness on her last admonition. Her brother's pronouncement at his daughter's birth that his little girl was "a wee bitty like" Adelina had proved true.

Michael had declared in a facetious moment:

"Aunt Addie's taller than Paddy just because she wears woolen stockings."

For a while, during which Patricia drank the tea and devoured several home-made doughnuts, both were silent.

"I wish I had money enough to keep you children in school, Pat," said Adelina, from her position at the stove. "It seems dreadful for all of you to stop now in the middle of your second year. If I hadn't promised Mike this place, I'd sell it—and—and—"

Her hesitating sentence was checked abruptly by Patricia springing up from her chair.

"You dear old plum," she exclaimed. "Not one of us would hear to that. I should think not! Besides, there's no need, Auntie. The Pater will get on his feet again soon, and in the meantime—But I haven't told you the best part of it. The boys and I are going on the stage! What do you think of that?"

"On the stage!" gasped Adelina. "Why, your father won't let you!"

"He wouldn't at first," admitted Patricia.

Then Aunt Addie had to hear all about Martin Brewer, how splendid he was and what big, handsome fellows he had said Barney and Michael were.

"Yum-yum cried when I told her about it," said Patricia, her throat thickening at the memory, "but mother has lots of sense, even if she can't see. And she was glad when she found it was Mr. Brewer who is going to have us in charge."

"Yum-yum" was Barney's and Michael's and Patricia's pet name for their small mother.

Several years before Charlotte Pepperday had lost the power to see, and it was a scrupulously followed rule of her family that, so far as possible, she should be kept in ignorance of the worries which once in a while eventuate in the most orderly of households.

"I argued with the Pater not to tell her our financial trouble right away," imparted Patricia, "but he said, 'Yes!'"

Adelina coughed to hide her emotion.

"The stage might be all right for you and Barney," she faltered. "But what about Michael? He's such an impetuous laddie!"

"He is a little headstrong, dear," conceded Patricia thoughtfully, "but he's so fine—he's so fine—"

"And so good," pointed out Adelina, quickly.

"Yes, the best and most beautiful boy in the world! There's something about him, Aunt Addie, that gets down deep in my heart. I've worried a lot over him, especially since he was mixed up in that hazing scrape at Princeton. But, of course, he'll be all right!"

"Of course!" came in smiling agreement. "Surely, he will!"

"Now you know as much as I do, dear," said Patricia, "and you needn't worry about the Pater, because I left him a lot happier with Yum-yum. I must run along home now."

She had harnessed on her skis and was ready to glide away when Adelina called to her:

"Paddy, don't breathe it to him, but I bought Michael a gold pencil for Christmas. Tell him to come over to-night if he can. Tell him I made him a mince pie, and he'd better come and get it before some one else eats it up."

CHAPTER II

PERHAPS, the Bar Association of the City of New York boasted no more spectacular figure than Patrick O'Kelleron. By birth he was connected with some of the oldest families in New England. His wealth, the inheritance from a paternal uncle, placed him among the really rich in the great city. Nevertheless, being a clear-brained young man, in the habit of doing his own thinking, he had made his fortune his servant and already, at twenty-seven, had made a not unenviable record in his profession.

But Patrick's ambitions reached beyond his legal practice, although he had been gratified at the invitation to join the staff of lawyers who acted as aides to the District Attorney of New York County and had accepted the assignment as a civic duty. Some day, however, he intended to try his hand at turning out a novel or, possibly, a play. But that would not be just yet.

With the delight of a boy he was now striding along the Fostertown Road on his way to the home of Edward Blake. The vast expanse of snow was glorious, and he was glad he had accepted Blake's invitation for the weekend at Balmville; not that he was enthusiastic over the holiday house party of which he was to be a member, for generally he deemed such affairs stupid. A fellow met so many uninteresting people, and in Patrick's opinion most social functions wasted a deal of valuable time.

However, the fact of the matter is, that an intimate friend of O'Kelleron's, Martin Brewer, had asked him as a personal favor to give the young politician a lift up toward a judgeship. So that when Blake had called him on the telephone that morning, he had considered this

an excellent opportunity to study the candidate in his own environment before he came out openly as his political supporter.

"He'll make a good enough judge, Pat," Brewer had said in one of their conversations. "Eddie's got the ambition in his blood, so let's help him get it out. His father was a pal of mine, and a fine-hearted chap he was, too."

O'Kelleron had just examined the signpost which notified him he had reached Blackberry Lane when he saw dashing down the road toward him a girl on skis, a small girl, very young, too, he imagined by the flaming color in her cheeks and the fearless blaze of her stone-gray eyes.

She descended to the level of his position where, once on the flat, she came to a halt. From his great height he impulsively sent her a dazzling smile. For her part she was startled by the sudden encounter with a man of such unusual beauty. Involuntarily her own face dimpled into a feminine response to his. An instant only she maintained her position. Then she sped away down the next grade, and he came to the conclusion that, although she was very little, she was not such a child after all. She was pretty, though! Yes, by Jove, more than pretty!

That same evening Madison Pepperday was seated in his den with Patricia on a stool at his feet.

"My little, little girl," he murmured, "I never would have believed you could have so satisfied your mother about your new venture. She seems entirely reconciled."

The speaker was tall and superelegant in boyish slenderness in spite of his fifty years. Only the thick, white hair that covered his head attested that age was creeping upon him.

"It's more than I can say about myself, though," he continued in a harassed voice. "But I can't see any other way just now."

She interrupted him by putting an arm around his neck.

"Oh, my Pater, my dearest dear," she breathed, "I love you better than anyone in the world, and you can have all the money I earn, and I imagine it'll be a lot for a fresh kid from what Mr. Brewer hinted.

"He said that we children all looked alike, and then I said: 'Well, we're triplets, that's why!' and he laughed and said I was to give you his congratulations, and to tell you he wished he had ten sets of three just like us. . . . I thought that was funny, Pater."

But she did not laugh. Rather did she lapse into the same silence that had fallen upon Madison Pepperday.

For a long time they sat thus, looking into the log fire. It was at these times, when alone with her father, that Patricia built air castles, and the flames, varying in color from a discernible blue to a luminous yellow, leaping up here suddenly and dying down in another spot into incandescent red embers, wiped away the ache that had hurt her through the family conferences.

Suddenly she glanced up.

"Pater," she began, "is there a man living around here anywhere with red hair — a man as big as Eddie Blake?"

Skirting Balmville and its vicinity with his mental eye, the Pater considered a few minutes.

"I don't know of any," he responded finally. "Why?"

"Nothing much," she answered, turning her pensive gaze back to the grate. "Only I almost ran over a stranger to-day at Blackberry Lane, and I wondered if any new families had moved in. He looked so enormous; why, I believe, he's even bigger than Eddie."

"There are several house parties in the neighborhood," interrupted Madison. "Christmas parties, you know. Perhaps, he's out for one."

"Perhaps," sighed Patricia. "That's very likely it."

She was secretly ashamed the next morning when she recalled her dreams. A big, big man with brilliant red hair and golden-brown eyes had smiled at her through her sleep-hours.

CHAPTER III

The succeeding eight months had erected a massive edifice of experience in stageland for the younger members of the Pepperday family. As the saying goes, Barney, Michael and Patricia had made good in vaudeville under the sobriquet of the "Golden Pepperdays." In a merry scene at their theatrical baptism Martin Brewer had dubbed them with this appellation.

Enthusiastic audiences in all the large cities east of Chicago had hailed the triplet trio with unlimited approbation; and now, at the beginning of the fall season, Broadway was to be given an opportunity to add her bit to their fame.

Thus it happened that one afternoon, early in September, Patricia sat, waiting in Martin Brewer's reception office in the Candler Building on Forty-second Street. She was enjoying the contents of one of his bulky pamphlets, and, as she read, she smiled, her fancy caught by the unconventional theme of his thesis. Every sentence was Breweresque. No mind but his could have conceived them, and no pen expressed them but one tipped with universal love.

During the months she had been associated with the distinguished playwright, she had discovered that he lived always on the high plane of the words under her eyes.

"The heart of the infinite God brims over with love for all the babies born into this good old world, white babies, red babies and black babies! God love 'em! God bless 'em! God save 'em!"

Patricia thrilled to her toes. Of course, she believed that, too. Somehow, the sight of a warm, wriggly baby

always touched her with an uplifted feeling akin to her response to a glorious strain of music, the sobbing of the fall winds or the roaring of the sea. For the moment she forgot that, not two hundred feet away, Broadway, black with people of her own cult, arteried the city from end to end. Martin's "God love 'em! God bless 'em! God save 'em!" slogan had suggested a picture to her sensitive mind of a vast army of children whose needs were great.

Her eyes darkened with sympathy. Emotional moments, like these, awakened a memory which she jealously guarded. A gust of wind, a flurry of leaves, a heart appeal, returned her in spirit to Balmville. So often had she pictured a red-haired giant smiling at her in Blackberry Lane that he was now a part of her daily reveries. He had become idealized among the fellow creatures of her intimate world. She had never seen him again and did not expect to, neither had she ever beheld a man like him. She sighed. She was positive that there was no other such invincible figure walking the earth.

With another long, indrawn breath, she fell again to reading.

"Subsidize the mothers! Give 'em money; give 'em comforts. Give 'em good food, fresh air,—in fact, bless their hearts, give 'em everything they ask for. I say to every man with a heart beneath his ribs: Dig down in your pockets for 'em!"

Patricia considered a moment. Many of her friends were mothers, and she had discovered in associating with them that, contrary to the world belief that stage women were butterflies, they worked endlessly, passionately, for their youngsters.

Some of Patricia's sadness was wiped away as the thought of her parents came into her mind. She and her brothers had spent the whole of yesterday with them in

Balmville. She glowed in remembering that the troubled expression had gone from the Pater's face. Out of Martin Brewer's steady upbuilding of broken lives, her father had reconstructed himself in such a manner that he was again venturing into business. Brewer had aided him materially; and Patricia realized that what the manager had done for the Pepperdays was but a small bit of his "God save 'em!" endeavor.

Once in a while, when she heard the elevator door open in the hall outside, she lifted her eager, dimpled face, and at length, when Brewer entered the room, she sprang up to greet him.

He was a tall, portly man in the prime of life, florid of complexion and scant of hair. The long years he had been in business in New York, writing and producing plays and managing theaters along the street of bluff and bustle, had etched lines upon his fine countenance in spite of its fullness.

As he caught sight of the girl's exquisite figure, a flush mounted to his forehead.

"Ah, Paddy, this is the best ever!" he exclaimed. "I'm sorry I couldn't make the rehearsal to-day. But never mind! You were all perfect in your parts in Baltimore, so I should worry. The fact is, girlie, I've got an excuse that can't be beat. I was looking over a string of kids as long as from here to the Battery."

Smilingly Patricia walked beside him through several offices where numerous stenographers were occupied at desks and on into a large room with "Mr. Brewer—Private." in black letters across a clouded pane of glass.

Once the door of his sanctum had been closed behind them, Martin's blue eyes beamed with delight. This was one of the times that he looked younger than his age. Seeing Patricia Pepperday had seemingly reeled back the calendar a good fifteen years.

"It's great to have you in New York, Lady Pat," he said warmly. "I'm as tickled as a boy with a new top, and Benny'll jump out of his shoes when he sees you this afternoon. Your work must agree with you, dearie. Sit there where I can shake a happy eyelid at you. Rehearsal went well I suppose?"

"Splendid," she exulted gaily, dropping into the chair he had drawn up near his work table. "And, Martin, Michael's making the hit of his life as David. People, especially the girls, are wild about him. Isn't he a picture in his shepherd's costume?"

"Always something doing when the Pepperdays are around," supplemented Brewer promptly. "Great kids, both your brothers! Two fine boys, Barney and Mike!"

Then his confident smile of ready acquiescence fell away into long, troubled lines. An image of another young man, his son, his only child in fact, had framed itself in his mind beside the Pepperdays. At the age of six, Benny Brewer had fallen from a tree and injured his back. For weeks he had hung between life and death, his father in frantic anxiety summoning surgical experts from every corner of the continent. Then, after weary months of torture, Benny had left his bed, the pallid shadow of his former self.

The smile trembled away from Patricia's lips. She had seen the gloom wipe the laughter out of her companion's blue eyes, and she knew the cause of his inner anguish.

"Martin," she ventured, "I know what you are thinking about."

"Of course you do! Ben's on my mind most every minute. But I'll be jiggered if that doesn't give me a chance to give you a pointer or two, Lady Pat."

Supporting her chin in the palm of her hand, Patricia bent forward uneasily.

"I always preach, Paddy," he began, "that, even if one's unhappy, it helps a lot to smile. It's gospel truth that you can't think of your troubles with a good, wide grin on! That's what I do when I'm with Ben, and I want you to do the same thing. See?"

"Now, if I come across a sick, hungry baby, do I go around, mollygrubbing, seeing him always ill? I do not! I hotfoot at him and stuff his empty stomach. Then I tickle him up a bit, and, by golly, he's soon as fat as a sausage."

"But I'm so sorry for Benny, Martin," murmured Patricia.

"Of course you are, sweet child! Your heart's as tender as a Christmas pudding, but you mustn't let Ben see how you feel. He's going to get well, that boy! Just how I don't know yet, but pitying him makes him a thousand times worse."

"Aunt Addie says that, too," she admitted slowly. "She says: 'Never think anything but good for yourself and the people you love, no matter what's ailing them.' I'm trying to do that about Michael, Martin. Oh dear, it seems the more you care for a person, the more you worry about him."

"Anything wrong with Mike?"

"Mercy no!" she replied in swift contradiction. "I suppose I'm a little jealous. No, I'm not when I really think about it. But the way some of the girls hang around him makes me disgusted. I tell you, Barney sees through their maneuvers almost before they start 'em."

Brewer puffed his cigar to a glowing end as he studied her bonny face. To-day he felt more deeply stirred at her close proximity than ever before. How very lovely she was! How artistically fashioned, her small hands; and their movements tempted him to caress them, but instead he smiled at her and changed the subject.

"Like it at Cavendish's, Paddy?"

"Yes, it's quite like home," she told him. "When we came in, we found Fatty Brown, Billy and Milly Foster there. You know they were at Cavendish's last winter while we were rehearsing, and we've met them in nearly every town—" At this juncture she became aware of the incurious expression on her companion's face. "Anything on your mind, Martin?" she asked. "You're not in the least bit interested in what I'm telling you."

He looked at her an appreciable time before he agreed.

"Yes! I have something on my mind. Seeing you here, Lady Pat, has brought me to a show-down. I can't shoot fancy stuff in everyday life, such as I stick in my plays, but I'm going to give you an earful, dearie, straight off. Will you marry me? Right away, Paddy, the sooner, the better!"

So unexpected was his question that it took her quite off her guard.

"Why, Martin, you mustn't make love to me," she expostulated, embarrassed. "We're just chums, you and I. But, of course, I couldn't—I couldn't marry you! Of course, I— Why—you could marry—the most beautiful woman in the world!"

"Lord, Pat, I deal with women all the time," Martin protested vigorously, "and most of 'em, if they have any chance at all, top men head and heels, but a fellow can't fall in love with more than one. Now with me, it's you, my dear! I've loved you since first I popped my eyes on you, back there before you went on the stage. Why—why—"

"Martin," she interjected, a burning flush suffusing her cheeks and brow, "you mustn't think of me like that. I'm only your girl pal and always will be!"

Her hands came together in an appealing clasp.

Throwing away the stub of his cigar, Brewer rested

both arms on the desk and brought the tips of his large fingers together, revolving one thumb over and over the other. When the manager twiddled his thumbs, his intimate friends knew he was nervous.

"Maybe, it does seem queer for a fellow like me to want to marry a youngster like you," he persisted after a quiet moment, "but my spirit isn't old in spite of my years, lambkin. And, goodness me, Paddy girl, I can't see any other woman and won't as long as you're on earth. You can have me and all— Poor Kiddie, have I scared the life almost out of you? Well, I didn't intend to at all; but think about it—a while. You don't have to say 'Yes!' bang off. The thought's kind of new—"

The knock that checked his speech was a relief to Patricia. It took an instant for Brewer to regain his self-control; then, "Come in," he called, and, "What is it, Claude?" he asked of his secretary who opened the door.

"Mrs. Clark's here by appointment to see you, sir!"

Brewer passed his handkerchief across his face.

"I forgot all about her," he mumbled to himself. "All right, Claude, ask her in, and say, old man, I'm going home after a minute, and if anything important comes up, give me a ring. . . . No, sit still, Miss Pepperday. You don't have to rush; Mrs. Clark won't keep me long, and it's nothing of a private nature."

Womanlike, Patricia took in at a glance the distinguished appearance of the stranger who swept into the office. She was very good looking and smartly dressed. She had all the earmarks of a society woman with a "mission."

"Mrs. Clark, Miss Pepperday," introduced Brewer, after he had shaken hands with his visitor. "Do be seated, Nancy! How's Patrick to-day?"

"He's very well," was the response, "but he's been

so busy lately, since he became attached to the District Attorney's office, that I've scarcely had a glimpse of him."

"I met your husband on the street a while ago," Martin remarked conversationally. "He looks as if the world were treating him squarely."

A fretful expression passed over Mrs. Clark's countenance.

"I left Alexander in bed with a headache," she commented dryly. "He said he wasn't going to leave the house to-day."

The manager perceived that he had, as he himself would have described it, opened his mouth and put his foot in it.

"Perhaps, he was called out," he offered as an excuse to rectify his mistake.

"Perhaps!" with a shrug, "but these men—"

"They're great brutes, aren't they, Nancy?" grinned Brewer. "I fight 'em tooth and nail, myself. I don't see how women stand 'em around."

For years Nancy Clark had been acquainted with this genial Broadway idol, and she did not approve of him at all.

"I don't wish to intrude, Martin," she observed, eyeing him with suspicion, "so I'll make haste to tell you why I came."

Then she glanced at Miss Pepperday, and that young person was persuaded that her presence in the playwright's office was not looked upon with approbation.

"No intrusion, Nance," exclaimed Brewer. "You know that as well as I do."

"Thanks, but I thought as long as I had fixed an hour to see you, you'd make arrangements not to be busy," laying stress on her words. "But then its public property, so I might as well speak out. Martin, do you know that I'm president of our 'Social Welfare League?' "

"Yes, I believe Pat did mention it," nodded Brewer.

"My son won't interest himself at all in the most vital questions of the day, and, while I dislike to say it, I know the blame for that, Martin, lies at your door. I fear that you are not at all familiar with the aims of our society, are you?"

"Somewhat!"

Patricia scarcely recognized the cold, monosyllabic tone. If he had spoken to her thus, she would have shriveled into nothingness, but, undaunted, Mrs. Clark proceeded:

"Well, to come to the point then, we wish you to cease your broadcast distribution of money to women who sin. I've asked Patrick to talk to you about it, but he told me he absolutely approved of your work. Strange that a boy of mine should close his eyes to loose morals." She sent one hasty glance at the quiet girl. "I presume it's his association with stage people. . . ."

As though in protestation, Brewer lifted his hand.

"You're treading on my toes, Nancy," he said, "and it hurts."

"I regret that I'm forced to speak in such a way to a friend of Patrick's," she retorted, flushing. "But right's right, and wrong's wrong! You encourage crime, Martin, immorality and all kinds of evils."

"I don't agree with you," came the swift denial.

"Evidently, or you wouldn't do it. However, the League sent me here to ask you to withdraw that ridiculous circular. . . ."

"What? The 'God save 'em!' one?" queried Brewer, and he laughed.

In Mrs. Clark's estimation it was not time for levity; so she squared her shoulders.

"Can't you see that helping such creatures only gives them a chance to go on and do worse, Martin?" she asked.

"No, I can't see it, my dear Nancy," asserted Brewer,

without weighing the question, "or any part of it. No woman is a creature, no matter what she's done. And the fact is that ninety-nine per cent of those we help are as honestly married as you are. Now you have chosen your work, Nance, and I don't interfere with it. I might, you know. I could come out publicly against you, but I believe in minding my own business, and I'm doing it, too."

Never had Patricia seen Martin look as he did then; his eyes flashed, and she was fired with pride by his dignity and earnestness. But, thoroughly incensed, Mrs. Clark rose to her feet.

"Patrick warned me I would be casting my pearls," she said haughtily. "Well, I hope you won't see the day you'll regret your connection with the stage and the position you've taken toward society."

"It might just happen, Nancy, dear woman," Brewer told her, rising, "that sometime you'll have cause to be glad with me. Good-afternoon! Come again whenever you like.

"See how I get it on all sides, Lady Pat," he chuckled, as the door closed on his caller. "Now, that's as good a woman as ever breathed the breath of life. The only trouble with her is, that she's got the notion she's God Almighty's daughter-in-law. But she can't tumble over what I do, thank Heaven!

"And me, well, dearie, people don't seem to realize just what a woman means to this world. Why, in my next evolution, I'm going to switch my gender, and I'll have twenty children and subsidize myself, by ginger!"

CHAPTER IV

A SHORT time later the Brewer limousine drew up before a house on Forty-eighth Street between Fifth and Sixth avenues. Brewer opened the door, stepped out and helped Patricia to alight.

"I'll be back before you know it," she said. "I only want to speak to Michael a minute."

The manager climbed back into the automobile to wait, as she disappeared into the house.

"Mrs. Cavendish, did my father phone me while I was out?" Patricia called down the basement stairs.

A thin young girl with a parrot on her shoulder scuttled into view from the dark corridor below.

"Any messages, Fancy dear?" asked Miss Pepperday.

"Fancy dear," repeated the parrot. "Aw, Fan, is breakfast ready? Hello, Fan!"

"You're a saucy boy, George Cavendish," laughed Patricia. "Here, George, here's candy! Catch it! Why, he snapped it right out of the air, Fancy! Oh, you smart old bird! Did anyone telephone me, Fannie child?"

Fancy Cavendish was a small, weak-minded creature with pale, expressionless blue eyes and light hair which was combed back without wave or ringlet from a brow rather too high and narrow.

"Yes, Miss Paddy," she replied, "your dad rung you up, and he's comin' in about dinner time. He said if you'd put off feedin' till he got here, he'd eat along with you."

Having imparted this, she began to climb the stairs, the parrot swaying to and fro, pecking at her face.

"George's awful bad to-day," she told Patricia as she

squatted on the top step. "Ma's wished him to the devil four times since mornin'. Babe Foster 'phoned in for her brother, too, but I wouldn't tell him about it, I wouldn't!"

"But that wasn't right, Fancy dear! She might want Billy to bring something to the theater for her. Perhaps, she isn't coming home until after the show."

"I don't care if she ain't! Why should I care?" harangued Fancy. "I hate 'er! She's always firin' George and me out of Bill's room the minute I stick my nose inside. Listen, while I tell you something, Miss Paddy. Bill's goin' to get married to me some day, maybe, to-morrow."

"Billy's a crook," croaked the bird, sotto voice.

"George heard Ma say that," sniffed Fancy. "Ma's dirt mean when she wants to be, which is most of the time, and she's got it in her bean Billy Foster's a wicked nut, but he ain't, or I wouldn't marry 'im."

"Girlie, you shouldn't say such things," chided Patricia. "Mr. Foster wouldn't like it if he heard you."

"Yes, he would, too, because he has. He's asked me to kiss 'im many a time, but George 'd gouge his eyes out if he touched me. I know something else, too. It's about your Michael!"

Sudden interest lighted up Patricia's face.

"Michael? What about Michael, Fancy?" she queried. "Tell me, like a good girl."

A quick look thrown over her shoulder informed Fancy that her mother was out of hearing.

"He wants to get married with Millie Foster," she hissed sibilantly. "I heard 'im sparkin' her when they didn't know anyone was around. Another thing: Milly doesn't like Mike half as well as she does Fatty Funny Breeches. I saw 'er hug 'im once. She loves Fatty like I do Billy."

As she said this, her pale blue eyes twitched, and her face flamed crimson.

"Well, I wouldn't talk about it, Fan dear," advised Patricia. "Don't you remember all the nice things I told you when I was here last?"

"Yes, I remember 'em, ma'am," nodded Fancy, "and George knows some of 'em, too. Every night I make 'im say: 'Now I lay me down to sleep,' and—and I always ask God to gimme Billy!"

A harsh voice, calling her name from the basement, set the young speaker all a-tremble.

"That's Ma," she ejaculated, shivering.

"Aw, Fan! Ma's underjaw wags! Haw, haw!" jabbered the parrot.

At that moment a large, angular woman appeared below stairs.

"Fancy, bring that pesky blatherskite down here. I'll teach him to gibble-gabble about my underjaw. Didn't I tell you not to be chasin' upstairs with 'im?"

With a flip of her apron, Fancy blindfolded the bird.

"Keep your mouth shut, you idiot," she muttered, "or I'll poke you one in the face. . . . He says over everything he hears, Miss Paddy. Sassy bird!"

"Never mind, honey! Run on down! Hurry! Then you won't get a slap," and Patricia sped on her way upstairs.

A seriousness had taken the curve from her lips as she opened her sitting-room door. A tall, handsome boy grinned her a greeting.

"Glance at that, Pat," he cried gleefully, spreading out a newspaper. "There's your countenance, my princess. What do you think of it? Say, aren't you a beauty, though? Lovely enough to be on a soap poster, by cracky!"

An expression of adoration swept across the girl's face,

and her glorious gray eyes seemed to devour the boy's comeliness.

"Oh, you darling," she gurgled, and then: "Now, don't be foolish, Michael dear, for, if I'm a beauty, so are you! Let me see! Isn't it great, Mike? It's the biggest picture I've ever had published."

"The 'Golden Pepperdays' are in New York," Michael began to read aloud over her shoulder with great gusto. "Beautiful Patricia Pepperday, with her brothers, Barney and Michael Pepperday, will make her first appearance in New York before a Labor Day audience at the Hypo Theater in a new act, written by Martin Brewer. The Pepperday brothers and sister are triplets, and out-of-town newspapers have not been sparing in their praise of the trio. Miss Pepperday plays the part of Truth, and her brother, Michael, the rôle of David, the shepherd boy. The act is called: 'The Streams make Glad,' and is said by those who have seen it to be one of the most brilliant Biblical allegories ever written."

"Some review, eh, sis?" chuckled Michael. "Mart touched the pulse of the press to get that! I'm going to chop it out and give it to the Pater to take home to Yum-yum and Aunt Addie. They'll burst with pride, I bet. I've been sitting here, making love to it for an hour. You're some bright bird, my love, eh?"

He quizzed her laughingly, putting around her one big arm. For the moment she lay against him, she reveled in the size of him, in the strength of him and in the wondrous love of him. In her estimation he was the epitome of all manhood's graces, and that was why she had dubbed him "King," a king with ebony curls and eyes softly luminous in happiness, but as sand-gray as her own were sand-gray when anger burned within him.

"Honey, I'm going to drive uptown with Martin to

see Benny," she said presently, drawing away. "But before I go, I want to ask you something."

"All right, Pat! I'm all ears, like a jack rabbit."

While she was tucking a curl into place, she studied his impudent, smiling countenance.

"Mike, you know I don't like to butt into your business," she commenced hesitantly. "I —"

In good nature Michael guffawed her to silence.

"I don't care if you do, sis," he interjected. "Now what have I done to displease your ladyship? You're as grave as a judge."

"Did—did you ask Milly Foster to marry you, Michael?"

The question related to the only intimate, tender passion of Michael's life. His levity vanished, and his brow contracted in a frown.

"About fifty times," he confessed slowly, "perhaps, more! But you knew I loved her, Paddy!"

"No, Miky, I didn't," came in quick contradiction. "I knew she always managed to wheedle herself into our parties on the road, and, of course, I was positive that she was head over heels in love with you. That was evident when we were here last winter."

Boyishly Michael marked out a figure in the rug with the toe of his shoe.

"Well, there's no need for you to worry about it, Paddy," he grumbled. "If I've asked her fifty times, she's refused me as many. She doesn't give a rap for me—not one single rap! I had to beg her almost on my knees to go to supper with me to-night."

The sister in her righteous anger felt a sudden impulse to enlighten her brother with the fact that Miss Foster's tactics had been learned in the hard school of experience. Patricia knew that the most willing woman was often most unwilling to manifest her willingness.

"I hoped you'd go with Martin and me to supper," was what she said. "And Milly's got her nerve with her to make you plead—" Then she laughed. "At least I'm glad you're not engaged to her, dear. Things might be worse! Be careful of the fifty-first time, though, Michael. Milly's a vamp! . . . There, darling, I didn't mean to hurt you or be catty. Give me a kiss, and good-by until dinner time."

On the stairs, going down, Patricia met a smiling, obese youth who made a funny grimace at her. She burst out laughing as he leaned against the wall and allowed one lid to droop over its dark eye.

"Just my luck to have you going out when I'm coming in, lady mine," he remarked, wrinkling his good-natured face. "I saw Brewer outside. Does that say he's waiting for you?"

"I guess it does, Arthur," she rejoined. "Mercy me, you're getting fatter by the minute."

"Me fat's me fortune, me dear," he stated, attempting to assume a tragic attitude. "Where's Milly? Seen her?"

Arthur Brown, whose friends called him "Fatty Funny Breeches," was the comedian in the Foster, Brown and Foster skit; and well might the lad be nicknamed "Fatty!" His chin was repeated several times in large rolls of flesh that well-nigh overwhelmed his collar.

"She's out, but Michael's in," responded Patricia. "Why, what's the matter, Artie? You look like a thunder cloud. It isn't becoming—that pout and frown!"

"Well, Pat, the truth is Mike isn't treating me square," he growled, straightening. "He knows I'm as good as engaged to Milly, and he's always butting in just when I don't want 'im. He's monopolized her in every town where we've happened to play together, and now he's started in here. I don't like it, and I shan't mind if you

tell 'im so. I'll crack his topknot some of these days if he doesn't take care."

"Goodness me, don't do that," uttered Patricia, "you might hurt him, but I'll tell you what I would do, if I were you."

With what grace he could muster, Brown salaamed low.

"On with your advice, little one," he drawled. "You know the old saying, 'out of the mouths of babes —' "

"Don't be stupid, Arthur," she interrupted, laughing. "But, if you really want my advice, here it is: Kidnap Milly and marry her before she knows what's happened to her. That's the only way you'll ever get her!"

CHAPTER V

SOME three or four years had run their course since Martin Brewer had erected a mansion on upper Fifth Avenue. From its corner stone to its octagonal tower the dwelling was one of grandeur. The man's own tastes were simple, but to make living in the world more enjoyable for his son, Benjamin, he would have gone to utmost lengths or squandered any amount of money.

Running under the observatory from east to west, also facing the north and south, were the lad's apartments. There were several small rooms and galleries which opened into and looked down upon a large studio, which was furnished in an artistic, up-to-date style. A wealth of pictures hung on the walls, and objects of art stood here and there among rare pieces of furniture. Beautiful rugs, the choicest weaves of the Orient, hushed every footfall. All across one end stretched the highly ornate pipes of a great organ.

As Patricia and Martin reached the last flight of stairs, leading to the top of the house, they paused. Benny was playing, and they stood quietly until the organ notes died to silence.

"Wasn't that gorgeous?" whispered the fond father ecstatically. "Now, wait just a second, girly, and we'll surprise him. I didn't tell him you were coming to-day.

"Sonny!" he called softly as he advanced into the room.

From the organ bench Benny slid to the floor. At the first glance, if only his height had been considered, one might have imagined him no more than fourteen years old; but a full view of him would have dispelled that illusion. A tousled-haired head in which burned eyes of

startling beauty, topped thin shoulders that sagged forward weakly. Long ago, Martin had plumbed the depth of his son's emotional soul; at times it was rich with kindliness, at others moody with unhappy genius. Endurance of great suffering had threaded his youthful countenance with fretful lines that reached to the corners of his mouth.

As he moved toward his father, his face wore a sorrowful, questioning expression.

"I didn't expect you back until dinner time, dad, but I'm glad you're here," he said in throaty tones. "I can hardly stand it alone, nowadays, even though I have my organ."

The dreary way in which the words were uttered fetched a groan from the innermost depths of Martin Brewer's being, but he smiled bravely as his arms fell across his son's shoulders. Then they sat down side by side on a carved oaken bench. Suddenly the man squared Benny around and looked at him.

"Ah," he ejaculated, "you've been moping again! Come, Come! We can't have that! . . . Look who's here, Ben! "

At the sight of the smiling Patricia, stepping from behind the velvet door hangings, Benny's face underwent a series of rapid transformations. The shock of seeing her sent the blood from its surface; then his heart, responding joyously, drove the red back to burn his cheeks and lift the brooding lines about his lips.

"Paddy, Lady Pat," he glowed. "Gee, but I'm glad! I thought—I thought, maybe, you weren't coming to see me."

"Ridiculous, Benny!" she laughed. "We struck town only night before last, and yesterday morning, of course, we went to Balmville. To-day so far I've been busy with rehearsal. So you see I'm here my first free mo-

ment. Your good daddy fixed us a turn at the Hypo, Benny. And you're coming to-night to give us a fine send-off."

"Ah, there's the telephone," exclaimed Martin, springing up. "I'll breeze back in a minute, kids!" and he hurried out of the room.

"Sit over here beside me, Paddy," entreated Benny, placing his fingers on the spot his father had vacated. Quite at home, Patricia took the proffered seat.

"Well, what have you been doing all the time I've been gone, Ben?" she asked.

"Nothing to speak of. I don't have much to do with people, you see. I've had my books, my pictures, my music and my dreams. I've loved getting your letters, though. But—but I've been mighty lonesome sometimes, Paddy dear!"

As he ceased speaking, Patricia was conscious of a pang of sympathy, but, remembering his father's warning, she did not express what was in her mind. What splendid opportunities life offered Michael and Barney just because they were strong, vital and good-looking!

"But you really ought to go out a lot, Benny," she said, putting her hand on his. "It would do you a heap of good."

Startled, he caught hold of her arm. Unknown to any other human being, Benny had set up a shrine in his heart for Patricia Pepperday, fixing her high in his holy of holies and worshipping her there to the exclusion of almost every other occupation and emotion.

"Lady Pat," he choked, "Paddy dear, do you care about me at all? Do you think you could — Could you like me a little? Will you marry me, Paddy?"

Before she could get her breath to answer, Martin swept into the room, a spectacle of smiling satisfaction.

"Had a fine chin over the telephone with Pat O'Kel-

leron, Ben," he remarked. "He's running up for dinner. He's in the District Attorney's office and is the son of that Mrs. Clark you met to-day, Lady Pat, and a corking, fine fellow. . . ."

Then he came to a sudden stop, conscious, somehow, that he was intruding.

"I've been asking Patricia to marry me," stated Benny. Then at his own temerity hot blood dyed his skin but fled away again, leaving it quite waxen. "You came just in time to prevent her answering me, father."

Patricia threw an imploring glance at the man who was standing as if rooted to the spot. He swallowed several times before he could speak, then he said quietly:

"I'll go out again then, son!"

"No, no, Martin," Patricia interposed. "Come over here and sit down. I want you to talk to us."

Reluctantly Brewer crossed the room. He suddenly felt very old. Oh, to have saved Benny from this, from the heart agony he realized the boy would endure! A feeling of helplessness depressed him; but in obedience to Patricia's desire, he sat down and waited for the next development of what seemed to him a veritable nightmare. It came upon him like a thunder clap that he had done his unfortunate son a terrible wrong by reason of the indulgent care with which he had surrounded him. The lad was utterly unfitted to cope with disappointments. Accustomed to having all his wishes anticipated, Benny was now to be denied the one thing upon which he had set his heart.

The silence had become keenly oppressive before Patricia ventured at length:

"I can't marry any one now, Martin. You know that! Benny, you see, I have my little mother and the Pater; and I must stay with the boys until they're both well on their feet."

In deep dejection Brewer listened. Was she merely making it easier for Benny, or did she mean that, if she had not so many burdens, she would really marry him?

He glanced from her to his son. How white he was! Benny and he loved the same woman! Yes, only that morning he had told himself his life would be ruined if Patricia refused to spend it with him. Now, he felt Benny must have her at whatever cost to himself.

"If taking care of your family's holding you back from marrying Ben, Pat," he said, "then don't let it. There's enough Brewer money for all of us, and Ben and I'll give you this house for your very own."

The assurance in his tones dispelled the bewilderment from Patricia's mind.

"But I don't want it," she faltered. "It's —"

"Dad, she's got to love me," interrupted Benny violently. "Oh, she's got to! She refused me because— Oh, God! because I'm as messed up as hell! "

"Benny, lad," the father entreated, then he checked himself. He had no word of comfort—no promise to give his afflicted child.

"It isn't that at all, Benny," choked Patricia, rising. "I just can't get married! Not yet! Oh, Benny, forgive me! . . . Martin, I'm going home."

"But I don't want you to, Pat," protested Martin. "Come on and stay to dinner. Please do! Ben'll buck up and not make you sad any more. Won't you, son? I asked Patrick O'Kelleron to dinner purposely to meet you, Patricia."

How many times afterward when life and love and life's and love's possibilities seemed crushed beyond reconstruction did Patricia wish she had stayed!

"But I must go," she insisted. "The Pater's coming."

"All right, then," assented Brewer. "Ask Jackson to drive you down. . . . I'm awful sorry about it, dearie! "

When they were alone, Martin cradled his son in his arms, crooning over him as tenderly as a mother would over an infant.

"Benny," he began after a while, "don't feel this way. You're knocking the stuff all out of me. Your dad'd give his life for you, old dear!"

"But what good would that do?" sobbed the boy. "I only want Lady Pat! I want her to love me — to marry me! You've got to make her marry me, father. You hear? You hear!"

The man remained silent so long that the lad lifted his head and looked at him. Then blue eyes pierced the depths of dark eyes for the length of time it took Brewer to decide to bare his own wound to lessen his son's pain.

"Ben," he hesitated, "I'll tell — you — something, and I hope it'll make you feel easier."

"Nothing anybody could say'd help me," wailed Benny.

Unheeding this, Martin muttered:

"I — I asked Patricia to marry me to-day — myself — dear boy."

"Oh," gulped Benny.

"And she refused me point blank without near the courtesy she showed you, Ben," Martin imparted slowly. "She didn't even give me any excuse whatever. She just said, 'I won't, Martin,' and that was all. There, son, there, there! Lady Pat's so all-fired lovely that she gets the heart of every man who pipes her with half an eye."

CHAPTER VI

THAT evening at nine o'clock Edward Blake wended his way through the dark aisle of the Hypo Theater, his teeth on edge and his spirit in an angry mood. He had flung himself into one of those fits of temper that came upon him whenever he allowed his mind to dwell on Patricia Pepperday.

As he took his seat, a slight sneer crossed his lips. Placards, which property men were just hanging in conspicuous positions, bore the announcement:

THE GOLDEN PEPPERDAYS

IN

THE STREAMS MAKE GLAD

BY

MARTIN BREWER

Ridiculous! Simply foolhardy for a writer even of Brewer's popularity to try and poke down the throats of pleasure-loving New York his fanatical, religious ideas! Blake conceded that religion was all right between the covers of the Bible, but for vaudeville — bah! It was not just to Patricia, either, to force her to appear in anything but the best.

While the orchestra played an *entr'acte* selection, the man recounted his failures with her and cursed his own stupidity. He might have known he could not buy a girl of her fine sensibilities. Too late he had arrived at the realization that he, himself, Edward Blake, clever, astute and brilliant, had thrust into Madison Pepperday's

hands the club with which Patricia had thrashed him effectually out of her life. She had been ruthless about it, too, the lovely witch!

He sighed as he remembered how relentless she had been when he had implored her to have faith in his protestations of reform.

No, she considered the affair none of hers when he threatened to drink himself to death! And, thank you, she did not wish the Pater to be under any obligations to him. If they happened to meet in public, she delivered him the haughtiest of curt nods and spoke to him only when it was absolutely unavoidable.

Blake's attention was turned from these bitter meditations by the rise of the curtain, revealing a setting in which he recognized instantly Martin Brewer's genius. His fury was increased when he caught sight of that gentleman and Madison Pepperday in the proscenium box to his left. It added to his dissatisfaction, too, on observing that Madison appeared as though he had never had a care in the world. Barbed with hate and infuriated at his own ineptitude, Blake turned his eyes back to the stage.

The back drop, a masterpiece in color, represented a mountain in Judea over which a river wound its way, like a broad band of silver. A delicate vapor rose from it and was drawn gently into the clouds. Only Martin Brewer could have invented the actuality of that sky line and edged those clouds with a warmth of crimson as if the sun were just beneath the horizon. A valley, flower-bedecked and tree-shaded, spread over the stage. A half-dozen sheep browsed in contentment at the foot of the mountain.

Then suddenly the small body of a girl was tossed out from the river's foam to a bed of purple-eyed violets. She was clad in simple white. Blue-black hair curled loosely about her face, and her dimpled, bare feet were sparkling

with drops of spray. She lay very still, her lovely face peaceful in sleep.

"God, but I've got to have her," groaned Blake.

When Michael Pepperday, garbed as the shepherd, David, stepped out from the shadowy wings and began his song, Edward Blake leaned forward and held his breath. He had not realized at all the beauty of the lad. Surely the God of Israel, to whom the youthful herder sang, had crowned him, a superb figure, there among the greens and golds of his sheep lands.

David sang to his hills, and he sang to his river, until Truth stirred in her sleep. Then she quietly sat up and smiled at him. Inspired by her presence to high endeavor, he recited with a spontaneous burst of melody the mighty phrases which Martin Brewer had gleaned from Holy Writ.

As the play advanced, Blake's admiration leaped to meet the dignity of the Biblical allegory. Who but a Brewer would have dared to stage it in a music hall? Who save Patricia Pepperday could have created the rôle of God's eternal Truth, and who but Michael portray the innocence of the mountain-born child?

And Barney Pepperday, clad in purple to his feet, made a magnificent "Mr. Worldly Wise Man," singing of the decadent glories of the sensuous kingdoms outside!

Tensely emotional, Blake dropped his lids. The Pepperdays had scored along with Martin Brewer!

When he looked again at the stage, Barney was triumphantly silent. David was face-down on the grass, and the little figure of Truth was bending over him.

The curtain descended slowly amid a silence that seemed to last for minutes. Then wild enthusiasm from the audience sent it up again, to show the shepherd's curly head held against Truth's breast. Then, as though she would rear a wall of harmony between him and the

tempter, she began to sing: "There is a River, the Streams whereof shall make Glad the City of God."

When Patricia's voice ceased, the house rocked with applause.

Blake looked toward Brewer's box. He knew by the expressions of the two men how profoundly stirred they were. He caught sight of Benny Brewer's tearful, white countenance, and exultation thrilled him to his toes. The puny boy was the great author's soul-thorn, the sting of which even Patricia Pepperday could not ease. He was glad of that—glad, glad, glad!

Yet he experienced the cutting pangs of jealousy when he heard, "Brewer—Martin Brewer!" roared upwards to the great dome. He saw Patricia trip forward, her hands extended to the playwright. With jaundiced eyes he stared at her as the man stepped from the box to the stage.

Then Barney in his splendid purple array, boyishly smiling, joined them, and with one sweep Brewer gathered the Pepperday triplets within his embrace.

An avalanche of tribute rolled from the balcony over Blake's head down through the orchestra circle and thundered over the footlights. Like its snowy prototype, the noise died away completely.

Then into that breathless quiet, Martin spoke:

"God love 'em! God bless 'em! God save 'em!"

And while the curtain was falling between the stage and the fervent people, Edward Blake noticed the speaker's eyes were full of tears.

Hating himself and the world in general, he arose immediately and went out. In the foyer of the theater he paused to light a cigarette. Then he walked into the street, and on the opposite corner he came face to face with Patrick O'Kelleron. For a moment they stood eye to eye, chin to chin, neither one able to boast an added quarter of an inch in height.

"Hello, Blake," exclaimed O'Kelleron. "Am I too late for Brewer's Pepperdays?"

Edward blew out a mouthful of smoke.

"You are, Patrick," he responded with assumed amiability. "It's just over.—Better luck to-morrow, perhaps. They're on for a long run if their reception is any sign. . . . Come over to the club for a game of billiards."

"I dined with Mart and promised I'd see his star kids tonight," remarked O'Kelleron, as they walked away together. "I'm starting south in the morning for a couple of weeks. I had an appointment which I had to keep before the show, and the time passed away before I knew it. . . . Were they good, the Pepperdays?"

"Fine," muttered Blake. "There's never been anything like 'em at the Hypo, nor anywhere else, I imagine."

Then they sauntered in silence the rest of the way to the Harvard Club.

Theater parties on foot and in conveyances were homeward bound when Edward Blake and Patrick O'Kelleron parted on the street in front of the club. Cocktails, numerous highballs, even his brilliant playing, had not succeeded in raising Blake's spirits. A gray-eyed sprite had hovered between him and the billiard balls. She had taunted him with inefficiency, dishonesty and all the liabilities he knew were labeled against him. In the end she had succeeded in making him lose to his opponent a game in which he was considered a past master.

He walked through Forty-fourth Street to Sixth Avenue in a state of mind bordering on collapse. He hesitated on the corner, undecided whether to go home or not. No, he hated the thought of his bachelor apartments. Among its elaborate knickknacks his imagination ran riot with longing for Patricia.

Mechanically he turned uptown, only to stop and stare

east on Forty-eighth Street. There, almost in the middle of the block, Patricia Pepperday lived. To sleep at all that night, he must plead with her for one more chance. Without waiting for further troublous cogitation, he strode the pavement toward Fifth Avenue with a tread that expressed a definite purpose. When he halted across the road from Cavendish's, he saw the streaks of light that filtered through the drawn curtains of a window on the second floor.

In less than a minute he was ringing the bell. He was wily enough not to ask for Miss Pepperday of the drowsy, frowning girl who peeped out at him. He wanted to see either Arthur Brown or William Foster, so he pretended to Fancy Cavendish.

"Second floor front," she squeaked at him. "Both of 'em's at home!" and, "Billy's a crook!" volunteered the parrot in the girl's arms.

Blake knocked softly on Foster's door, and a sullen voice growled:

"If you're good lookin', come in; if not, stay out!"

With an unsteady laugh, Blake opened the door. William Foster and Arthur Brown were sitting alone at the table, and all in a glance Blake took in that the boys were, "Three sheets in the wind, and the other one flying." So much the better, he told himself, as he advanced into the room.

CHAPTER VII

THE theatrical world is a world by itself. Like an infant spoiled by fond parents, it turns night into day and most of the day into night. Any one, long in New York, knows there is no sleep where actors take up their abode until after the small hours of the morning wane into larger figures.

Clara Cavendish's house on Forty-eighth Street was no exception to this rule.

On the second floor front William Foster shared a room with Arthur Brown. Adjoining this was Millicent Foster's two-room apartment. The Pepperdays occupied the third floor, Barney and Michael together, while Patricia had established herself directly over Miss Foster.

The great clock in the tower of the Metropolitan Building had notified New York that it was time for even the restless Tenderloin to cease its gayeties by booming forth the hour of one.

The city was in the last throes of a strenuous evening when Patricia arrived home, having partaken of an after-the-show supper with Martin Brewer. As she entered the house, she was conscious of a sense of satisfaction, mixed with a little worry.

At the Grand Cenral Station the Pater had whispered congratulations and endearments in her ear, and she had seen the train carry him away to Yum-yum, acknowledging in silent humility that she had rather be worthy of his dear benediction than the possessor of the world's wealth. Barney had gone directly home from the station to rehearse more vim into his lines. Michael had trailed away with Millicent Foster, and Benny, to Patricia's

consternation, had insisted that he was not hungry — that he was tired and wanted to go home.

One flight up Patricia paused near William Foster's door. She heard Billy's peculiar falsetto cut through Funny Breeches' loud laugh. Waiting only long enough to assure herself that Michael was not within, she went on up the stairs.

A distinct line appeared between her arched brows. The fact of the matter is that the fly in Miss Pepperday's ointment was Milly Foster. She might deceive an innocent, fine-hearted fellow like Mike with her assumed shyness, but she could not pull the wool over another girl's eyes for a minute.

Sighing, partly in happiness, partly because the small, blonde dancer menaced the harmony of the Pepperdays, Patricia opened her sitting-room door and went in. Save for the glimmer from the night lamp in the hall, the room was dark. She switched on the electricity and began drawing off her gloves.

A weak throaty sound from near the window wheeled her about, and she stood an instant as if she fain would accuse her eyes of telling a falsehood. Benny Brewer was crouched in an armchair, his long fingers locked about his thin knees.

"My goodness, Benny!" she gasped. "Why—why —"

Benny pulled himself to his feet and stood before her.

"I had to come—to see you alone, Paddy," he began, white and agitated. "I—I—I came right back here after I left you. Father said he was coming home early. So I supposed you would, too. I commenced to think you were going to stay out all night."

"But you shouldn't have come here so late, dear," quivered Patricia in dismay; "and your father—"

"He won't find out I'm not home. He never bothers

me when he comes in, and nobody knows I'm up here but Fancy Cavendish. I gave her five dollars not to tell, and she swore she wouldn't."

He began to sob weakly, begging her not to send him home until he had told her what he had come to say.

In a frantic desire to quiet him, she rushed forward.

"Hush, Benny, you mustn't cry like that," she entreated. "Wait a minute, and I'll run into Michael's room. He won't mind getting out of bed, and he'll take you home in a cab."

But Benny was too intent upon himself to notice the anxiety in her tones.

"No, I don't want to go home," he wailed. "I won't go away. I don't want any one but you, Paddy. Oh, how beautiful you were in 'The Streams!' Please be kind to me. If you will, I'll promise not to cry any more—I'll do every blessed thing you ask me to do. Honestly I will!"

Clouding tears rose to Patricia's lids. All the mother-heart of her went out to this lachrymosal tomtit of a boy ravaged with the passions of a man. She suddenly forgot the premonitions that had at first crowded upon her. Consequently she seated herself and drew him to her side.

"Benny," she said with unwinking solemnity, "now you'll listen to Paddy quietly, won't you?"

He sank to his knees and laid his head against her.

"Will I listen to you?" he echoed feebly. "Oh, your voice is like heaven, Pat dearest, sweeter—much sweeter. Let me stay right here, my darling. I love it down here at your feet. . . . God, I'm so miserable, so awfully unhappy! Sometime I'm going to be well! I could be now if you'd help me—if you'd love me. I want to get married to you to-night, Paddy. I—I want—"

"For mercy's sake, Benny, everybody'll hear you if

you shriek like that," she cautioned, terror-stricken. "Of course, you're going to get well, dear boy, and I'll help you all I can. But don't talk any more now about getting married. When you grieve so, it makes you worse, dear. Hush—please, please!"

At her tender warning he huddled over on the floor.

"I've made a fool of myself, I know," he winced in shame. "But I can't think of anything or anybody but you, Paddy. You're angelic enough to say it's not because I'm so infernally ugly you don't like me. It is, though! But—but—I thought, if I could see you alone, I could persuade you to marry me now, and I had something to tell you besides. Patrick O'Kelleron was up home to dinner to-night, and he said he knows a fellow that was hurt like me, and he's well! Dad got the doctor's name, but, Paddy, I couldn't stand an operation unless you were with me. I thought because—because I played so well, maybe, you'd forget how I looked for awhile. . . . I *can* play, Pat dear, I can!"

"Why, of course, you can, Benny," she upheld him. "You're perfectly magnificent! I love you when you are playing! Now, there you go again! What did I say? Benny, if you'll stop crying, I'll tell you something that will relieve you, I know. I'll sit right down here beside you—see?"

"There, now put your tired head against Paddy."

She captured his ice-cold, restless fingers, those talented hands, in hers. She began to speak in low tones, and as she went on, Benny's tears were dried. He lay very quiet with closed eyes while she told him the illuminating truths taught her by a blind mother who in physical darkness radiated spiritual light. She quieted his aching nerves by gently smoothing his hair as she quoted uplifting verses that came from the subconscious memories of her childhood. She crooned to him, too:

"Lead Kindly Light amid the Encircling Gloom."

And as she sang that beloved hymn with Benny's frail frame leaning against her, another man with glistening red hair smiled at her from her storehouse of fancies. No! Of course, she would never marry!

"Lead thou me on," fell softly.

Benny was asleep. With the touch of a fairy she pressed his dark head against her as she ceased singing.

Then for how long Patricia never knew, she golden-dreamed of that lofty figure in Blackberry Lane. Benny stirred a little just as she had registered a vow to follow in Aunt Addie's footsteps. When the Pepperdays needed her no more, when she was an old, old maid, she would go back to Balmville, to Blackberry. . . ."

Blinking his eyes, Benny suddenly sat up.

"Now, dear, you feel better, don't you?" she queried. "Let Paddy get a taxi and send you home, if you don't want Michael."

Out of that hour, out of that group of early morning minutes, while heavening hope into Benny Brewer's withered being, there marched into Patricia Pepperday's life a desolate wretchedness that comes to few. In future periods of retrospection, her one remorseful cry was, "Why didn't I go for Michael?" Instead, she assisted Benny to his feet and helped him wash away the signs of his tears and comb his tumbled hair.

"I don't know what Dad'll say to me if he finds out I've been here," he said when they stood ready for departure.

"We won't tell him," she answered, smiling reassuringly. "We won't mention it to any one. It'll be our little secret, just our own hour. Will that be nice?"

CHAPTER VIII

"GOLD PENCIL PONIARD!" blazed a scarehead across the top of an "extra" that appeared on the streets of New York about ten o'clock the next morning.

"Mysterious Killing in Actor's Rooming House," was the subtitle, and the news article read:

"The Cavendish residence on Forty-eighth Street, a well-known theatrical rooming house, was thrown into an uproar at an early hour this morning, when the landlady discovered Arthur Brown, one of her lodgers, murdered, near the fire escape on the second floor.

"The police were immediately notified and took charge. They are engaged in investigating what promises to be one of the most unusual crimes that was ever committed in this city.

"The only lodgers in the house were the slain man, William Foster and his sister, Millicent, all of whom had rooms on the second floor, and the Pepperday Triplets, consisting of Barney and Michael Pepperday and their sister, Patricia, who occupied the rooms on the floor above.

"Brown was dressed for the street, and his hat lay on the floor beside him. The body was oddly crumpled up as though the dead man had sunk to the floor in a heap and had been left as he had fallen. When an attempt was made to straighten out the corpse, the coat fell back and disclosed the gilt knob of a metal lead pencil protruding through his silk shirt on the left side. The stiletto-like instrument had penetrated his heart. Death had been instantaneous. Bleeding was internal, and there is no clue in the hall or about the body to show by whom

or how the fatal blow was struck — except the pencil itself.

“There are, undoubtedly, many thousands of such pencils in use in this city. It was of the familiar type: Gold-plated, a little shorter and about the thickness of an ordinary wooden lead pencil. On the knob was engraved the monogram of Michael Pepperday. There is no doubt that it is his pencil. Pepperday himself identified it. It is equally certain that it was in his possession last evening.

“Mrs. Cavendish was not at home during the night. Her daughter, Fancy, seemed singularly reticent and obstinate when questioned. From her it was learned, however, that the only person outside the regular lodgers in the house last night was Edward Blake, an alderman of this city.

“When interviewed, Mr. Blake said that he went to call upon Foster and Brown, who occupy a room together, some time after one o’clock in the morning and remained there until after four. He found both actors in, but he had not been there long when Brown went out, certainly before two, he thinks. Besides William Foster there were his sister, Millicent, and Fancy Cavendish in the room all the time Alderman Blake was there. None of them ever saw Brown again, and Mr. Blake was horrified when told of his death.

“Every one in the house has been examined and given minute and circumstantial account of his actions except Michael Pepperday. He refuses to answer any questions or give any information whatever as to where he was or what he did after one o’clock this morning.

“It is known, however, that he returned to the Forty-eighth Street house about midnight with Millicent Foster and went to her brother’s room and played cards with Foster and Brown until about one. Mr. Pepperday did

break his silence enough to say that he lent the pencil to Brown to figure the score, but it is significant that a pencil with a good point was found in Brown's pocket, and Foster, the other player, does not recall that Pepperday's pencil was used.

"Young Michael left before Blake came in and while Brown was still in the room. Pepperday was recognized in a restaurant on Sixth Avenue about half-past one where he bought some cigarettes.

"Barney Pepperday reluctantly admitted that his brother did not come to bed until daylight.

"There is also abundant evidence that Michael Pepperday was on unfriendly terms with the dead actor.

"The slain man was the comedian of the troupe of 'Foster, Brown and Foster' which has been showing for some time at the Hypo Theater. On account of his enormous size and laughable antics, he was nicknamed 'Fatty Funny Breeches.'

"The Pepperdays opened last night at the Hypo in a playlet entitled, 'The Streams Make Glad,' and scored a tremendous hit. The play is a biblical allegory, a brilliant production, written and staged by that master of stage-craft, Martin Brewer. The trio sang superbly, and their beauty was remarkable. Especially striking and picturesque was Michael, who created the part of 'David, the shepherd boy.'

"No arrest had been made at the hour of going to press, but one may be expected soon."

Some sixty hours after the tragedy found Michael Pepperday leaving the District Attorney's Office. There hung over his jaded features a furtiveness that ticketed him a guilty man to the stealthy representatives of the criminal court who dogged his every footstep.

Cruel, official gruelling, lasting hours, had reduced him to such a state of exhaustion that he could hardly muster

courage to plod into the sunshine. Inscrutable faces, belonging to men who in the last two days had become familiar figures in Forty-eighth Street, sprung from nowhere the instant he moved to the pavement. Assuming a nonchalance that did not deceive his custodians in the least, he paused deliberately and lighted a cigarette. Then he walked slowly to the subway.

Pretending that he was not troubled about his pursuers, he mounted the Cavendish steps, took out his key and unlocked the door. In his desire to escape the satirical, watchful eyes, he scuttled out of sight in a rush that only tacked to him another label of his culpability.

He trudged wearily upstairs, halted before Miss Foster's room and signified his presence by three short raps.

A small, blonde girl flung open the door but cowered back when she saw him.

"Come in, Mike," she said with a gasp. "Billy's here! But he was just saying that he had to run away."

The atmosphere of suspicion which seemed to envelop the whole house was reflected in the greetings exchanged between the two men. Michael's attitude, moreover, was a trifle haughty and preoccupied, while the other's was sly and obsequious.

William Foster was of slight build, fair of face and hair and but a little taller than his sister, and now he felt insignificantly mean as he shifted his gaze from Pepperday to Millicent, who stood, confusedly twisting a blonde curl around her finger. An almost imperceptible motion of her head told him it was time for him to be gone.

"Well, I'll vamoose now, sis," he muttered. "I'll see you at dinner."

He minced out of the room, holding his head as high as he could. On his precipitate flight down the stairs

his rage grew. How dared Michael act so superior! All the Pepperdays behaved as though they had been born miles above ordinary mortals. His face waxed hot as he thought of Patricia. He wondered if she would look through him the next time he met her as she had the last. He shivered at the thought. Well, no matter! Soon he would dare ask her to marry him, and she would not laugh at him; she would snap at his proposal. Before the District Attorney finished with Michael, the Pepperdays would come down off their high horses.

Meantime Millicent was staring at her companion with fear-laden eyes.

"Michael," she said timorously, "oh, you told 'em, didn't you? You're as white as a ghost! What—what happened to-day to make you look like that? Something worse than yesterday?"

An apathetic nod from Michael indicated how harrowed was his soul as he sank into a chair. To cover her craven chicken-heartedness, Millicent gathered up the garment she had been mending.

"I'm getting into deeper waters every minute, Babe dear," he told her tonelessly. "The doctors have figured out that Fatty died between one and four o'clock that morning. Except for the few minutes I was at the Chink's for suey, you know where I was. Don't hold me to my promise, Baby, don't!"

It seemed a coon's age that she stitched and stitched and stitched in silence, the needle making a ticking sound each time it caught the cloth. Michael, watching her, wondered how she could guide it so accurately when the whole world was topsy-turvy. She did not act as though she had heard a single word he had spoken.

"You'll let me tell 'em, Milly," he urged. "You saw those three men outside yesterday? Well, they trailed me downtown and back again to-day."

Milly untangled a knot in her thread, and in so doing, she sighed.

"You imagined it, Mike," she expostulated. "You're nervous, that's why."

"Righto, I'm nervous, and I don't deny it, but I can't be bamboozled into believing I'm blind, Milly darling. You'll change your testimony, won't you, for my sake? You don't know how much I need you to stand by me."

Wrinkling her brows thoughtfully, she lifted her hands to thread her needle anew, but her fingers trembled so she suddenly dropped them into her lap, and then she fixed her bright entreating gaze upon him.

"But—why,—Mike—dear,—why?" Her appeal was impelled by several gasping breaths. "There are so many reasons against our saying a word about it. In the first place they can't prove it on you anyway. You've already sworn that you loaned your pencil to Fatty. It's too bad that none of the rest of us remember it, but they'll take your word for it."

Suppressed sobs, coming from between the bobbing yellow curls on her bowed head, a dear head he adored to the depths of his boyish heart, reached Michael like so many sword thrusts.

"Milly dear," he blurted, his lips trembling.

"What, — honey!" she asked with face still hidden.

"Don't cry!" was all Michael could think of to say.

"But I can't help it, Miky. You know I can't! I'd be ruined, sweetheart, if—if you told on me! I never could hold up my head again, and I've always been so proud of my good name. Then I'd be arrested for swearing I was with Fannie and Billy and Eddie Blake until after four o'clock.—But I wouldn't care about that as—as—I would— Patricia'd never even look at me again. She's so awfully good!—Your father'd hate me, too, for being so wicked! Your dear, blind

mother wouldn't have me for her — her daughter. Oh, Michael, if I'd only been a good girl — If I'd only married you in Baltimore! ”

Slowly Michael rose to his feet. He could not endure any longer seeing this girl, whom he loved and who loved him, agonize so. His danger of arrest, a danger which hung over him like the sword of Damocles, fled from his mind. With one bound he was on his knees beside her, but she shrank away, although she allowed him to kiss her hands passionately.

“ I'm so ashamed,” she moaned, “ so horribly ashamed, my shepherd, David. You must go away now. I'm going — downtown and — and tell 'em. — After that you'd never marry a girl whose reputation—”

She fell forward against him in convulsive weeping.

“ I never knew how much I loved you, boy, — till — till now! ”

Michael snatched her into his arms.

“ Dear little girl,” he articulated brokenly. “ Oh, my sweet, how precious you are! You shan't say one word about that—that—night,” he kissed her again and again, “ and neither will I. See, darling, how happy I am! You're mine, all mine! And I'm all yours! — My baby mustn't cry any more! — Now, smile while I tell you something.”

She peeped up at him shyly, her lips curling upward a trifle.

“ I love you so much,” he stated in sharp emotion, “ that—that before I'd tell anything you didn't want me to, I'd let 'em tear me to pieces, inch by inch. — As long as you love me, nothing else matters.”

CHAPTER IX

ABOUT ten days subsequent to the killing of Arthur Brown, William Foster picked his way gingerly along Forty-second Street through a drizzling, cold rain. He detested wetting his shoes. A cat, crossing a muddy road, could not have trod more daintily than he, and his dapper neatness was a protest against the dirty inclemency of the weather. If his errand had not been of the utmost importance, he never would have ventured out on such a day.

The thought that, perhaps, in a short time he would be so well fixed that he would be able to summon a taxi, or, possibly, buy a car, made him discharge a low, delighted whistle. Yet, underneath his superficial sparkle and immaculate appearance, there surged a confusion of conflicting hopes and fears.

That morning Martin Brewer's curt telephone message in answer to a letter he had written him had jolted the young man's self-importance to a positive degree.

"Well, what do you think of that, Babe?" he had sniffed at Milly. "He'll see me—me—'for five minutes!' Five minutes! I bet he gives me more than five minutes to-day, and after this he'll greet me like a long-lost brother. I'll throw him a mouthful of words that'll stick in his crop for many a year.—I tell you our fortune's made, my dear girl!"

"Go to it, my love, but be careful how you handle Brewer," Milly had cautioned sweetly.

Foster was ushered into Brewer's private office the moment he presented his card, but an uncomfortable flush crimsoned his face as he met Martin's probing blue

eyes. He felt he was being analyzed molecule by molecule.

"What's up?" said the playwright brusquely. "I'm almighty busy to-day."

Not having received an invitation to be seated, the actor sagged against the table. He almost wished he had not come.

"What's the rumpus, Bill?" reiterated Brewer.

To screen his confusion, Foster took from his pocket a lilac-bordered handkerchief which he flitted across his face. Drops of water were oozing from his pores, and he experienced the sensation of smothering. The other man sniffed his disgust as an abominable odor of cheap perfume was wafted to his outraged nostrils.

"I should have seen you before this, Mr. Brewer," began Foster.

"Well, as you were in New York, and I was in Chicago, you couldn't very well see me, could you? That's a fact you can't get around. I just got back this morning.—What do you want?"

Running the tips of his delicate fingers along the edge of his collar to separate it from his damp neck, Foster considered how best to open his attack.

"Mike Pepperday's been arrested," he began again, "and his sister —"

"Well, I know all about that. That isn't your business here. What is it?"

"Did Benny—" the little man moistened his parched lips. "Did Benny," he repeated, "tell you where he was the night Fatty Brown was killed?"

So unexpected was this question that Brewer started to rise, then sat down again; but not for a moment did he lower his piercing glare from the almost unnerved actor.

"He didn't need to tell me; he was home," he vociferated. "He was home—in bed!"

Ah, thought Foster, my guess was pretty straight!

"You saw him there?" he asked significantly.

"No, but—but I know it!"

The speaker's lips closed on the last word in a straight, hard line. He so detested Foster and men like him that he was tempted to kick him out of his office without further ceremony.

But now the ice was broken, William Foster relieved his tense muscles by leaning over the table. He looked directly into the manager's face.

"Well, — he — wasn't home," he declared with emphasis. "He—he was at Cavendish's. I saw him there after two o'clock in the morning."

Brewer suddenly stiffened into an iron rigidity. The implacable blue challenge he sent the other across the distance between them lost its sting on the way. Billy knew whereof he spoke; and Martin Brewer did not.

"What are you trying to do, Foster; fasten this thing on Benny?" Martin blared, tallow-white.

"No, I'm not; of course, I'm not," he hastened to answer, locking and interlocking his nicely manicured fingers. "Not if he isn't mixed up in it in any way! That's what I came to find out."

"Sit down," growled Brewer.

Carefully pulling his trousers far up from his silk-clad ankles, the actor dropped into a chair.

"I came along to have a talk with you before saying anything about it to any one else," he announced in evident relief. "It doesn't seem right to me that Michael Pepperday should be blamed for a murder he didn't commit. Everybody that was in the house that night's been questioned by the police but Benny, and I thought if you knew he was there, you'd make him come forward and own up what he knows about it. Ben hated Funny Breeches like a hell cat."

That was true! Brewer had long known of his son's antipathy for the fat comedian. He remembered that once on preparing a list of theatrical guests for an occasion of festivities at his home, he had included Arthur Brown among those to be invited. He could hear Benny's voice ringing in his ears, now. "I won't have Funny Breeches here, dad! I hate him!" Probing for the reason, he had obtained Benny's explanation. "He teases me every chance he gets. I can't help it because I'm sick, can I?"

Had Benny put an end to Brown's jokes by putting an end to the joker?

In the next few dots of time, it seemed to Martin that his life blood seeped out, drop by drop. He breathed audibly and with effort. He recognized in the man before him an actor of the blackmailing type. The rat wanted something! What was it?

"You say you saw Ben in the Cavendish house?" he demanded heavily.

Quick comprehension was one of Foster's few virtues. He concealed the exultation that welled up in him when he told himself that he had bayoneted the one raw spot in the playwright's make-up.

"I sure did," he nodded.

"And you're giving me the chance to tell the police myself! Is that it? Why haven't you? How am I to understand this thing, Foster?"

"If I'd been going to do it, I wouldn't be here now, would I? You got brains enough to know that!"

"Who saw Ben there besides you?" asked Martin.

"No one that I know of. At least it wasn't mentioned at any of the hearings."

"Does Ben know you saw him?"

"No, he doesn't, nor anybody else, either!"

From Forty-second Street shifted up a din, audible

through the closed windows. Trucks rumbled, and auto horns honked. Trolleys clanked and clattered on their noisy way. Underneath it all ran the low, persistent hum of the city, the conglomeration of all the noises made by human creatures intent on the sordid business of grubbing up a living.

Brewer longed for a lull in the racket to straighten out his disordered thoughts.

"Come back to-morrow at twelve, Foster," he said finally. "I'll see Ben first before telling you what I'll do.—Can I rely on you not to say anything to any one about it in the meantime?"

There was a significant directness in the speaker's words that popped Foster to his feet. Only too willingly he gave his word to be silent, suavely, almost obsequiously. Then he vanished from Brewer's sight, leaving him staring at the closed door.

CHAPTER X

SIXTY times had the minute hand hitched forward on his watch dial, and yet Martin Brewer sat hunched over his work table. The cornerstone had suddenly crumbled from beneath his temple of faith. Life and life's aspect had changed while the sun was moving from twelve o'clock to one. He had made an appointment by wire from Chicago with Patricia, and for no other person save her would he have waited that interminable hour following Foster's call. He was heartsick to rush to Benny, yet strung to the snapping point of sympathy for the Pepperdays. He glanced at the clock. Three minutes past one! She would be here any minute now. Could he look into her truthful gray eyes and not pour into her ear the story the impish actor had told him? He shuddered back into his chair.

Benny! Now, what on earth had called Benny to Cavendish's? Patricia, of course! He would ask her.

The sharp ring of the telephone brought the cold sweat to his brow. He snatched off the receiver.

"Miss Pepperday calling," was announced in his ear. "Show her in instantly," he answered.

Then he stood up, corpse-white, pulled down his vest and was still standing erect when the door opened. A figure, heavily veiled, swept in and banged the door shut before the dignified secretary had time to think about it.

For a moment Martin stared at the newcomer. She was not Patricia. Yet, there was a certain familiarity about her! The same faint perfume of violets that always came along with Lady Pat forced him around the

table. When she tossed back her veil, there was revealed a pale face out of which burned a pair of Pepperday gray eyes.

"I'm Michael's Aunt Addie, Mr. Brewer," she faltered scarcely above a whisper.

"But Patricia," exclaimed Martin, and then he remembered his manners.

"Sit down, do, Miss Pepperday, in this chair. You're quite out of breath."

No wonder Adelina was out of breath! She had literally raced from Forty-eighth Street to the Candler Building.

"Paddy's—dreadfully—sick," she panted, swallowing after each word. "She's been taken to the hospital—Roosevelt. She—she kept saying you'd help us, so I—I came —"

Ah, surely then, as she bowed her head and wept, did she resemble Patricia! Like her niece, she was one of those small women to whose grief the heart of a large, fatherly man, like Martin, responds without reservation. She so called upon his compassion that he almost blurted out that Michael was not the murderer, that, perhaps,—But he bit back the words. It was only a "perhaps" after all, so far as Benny was concerned.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am, Miss Pepperday," he said. "I hustled home the moment my secretary wired me about Michael.—I'm very glad you came to see me! Now tell me what I can do. Anything! I—I don't know what to say."

"Say you know Michael didn't do it, Mr. Brewer," she appealed, swaying dizzily. "My Miky wouldn't murder anybody! You know he couldn't! Everybody knows it!"

In the years he had been on Broadway, Brewer had faced many unusual situations. But here was one that

stirred him beyond his own comprehension. Youth had always drawn him. To the sorrows of youth he had lent a wide charity. But there was some element in the pleading of the "Golden Pepperdays' " Aunt Addie, of whom he had heard time and again, that set his pity in motion unaccountably. His one desire, that now surmounted all others, was to soften her hurt. He was tempted to put his hand on her shoulder, but instead he coughed, drew up a chair and sat down as close to her as propriety would allow.

"Now let's talk it over quietly, Miss Pepperday," he begged.

"I can't. I can't," she wailed. "My baby boy's in the Tombs! He's always been my baby, Michael has. I — I chose him out — out of the three. It was awful the way the officers snatched him right out of his bed! Think of that! Think of that!"

She lifted a face so distorted with anguish that Brewer for a moment was almost beside himself.

"Your brother," he began hoarsely.

"Madison and I came down the minute Barney telephoned us," she interrupted. "How hard-hearted those detectives were, harder hearted than I ever knew men could be. They were so cruel to Patricia when they took Michael away. What less could they expect but that the poor child would fight against their arresting that innocent boy? Then— Oh, Mr. Brewer, Barney says she went quite out of her mind. There was a terrible scene at that dreadful Cavendish house. She's so ill that — that — maybe, she'll die!"

Evidently this aspect of the situation had not occurred to Aunt Addie before, for she grew rigid in body, her countenance portraying an anxiety that hurtled its way to Brewer.

"Please, little woman, don't say that," he prayed

huskily. "She's too young — too lovely — too — We won't let such a thought come into our minds. Shake hands on that! "

She thrust out her fingers, shaped and nailed like Patricia's, and Martin's large hand covered them. In spite of his own torture, he was endeavoring to put some courage into Adelina's torn soul, and by the way the wrinkles were spreading out of her face, he imagined he was succeeding.

"Now, start at the beginning, and tell me all about it," he urged in gentle insistence. "It'll ease you a lot, and I'm always right here, — Aunt Addie, — always right here for all the Pepperdays."

She was staring at him, her eyes widening questioningly.

"I wondered if you'd go down to the Tombs and see Michael," she shivered. "We've all talked to him, but — but — he won't say a word that'll help him at all." She choked, and Martin fondled the hand he held.

"Yes, Aunt Addie, yes?" he prompted her brokenly.

"I can't understand it," she stumbled on. "My boy wouldn't even tell me where he was that night. Barney says that Patricia insisted he was with that Miss Foster, but the girl says he wasn't, and so does her brother. The two of them swear that Mike only played cards in Mr. Foster's room a little while, and then he went away. Edward Blake was there, too. He's a wicked man! None of them saw Mr. Brown alive after he left the room. At least, that's what they took their oaths to."

"Didn't Mike go to bed?" ventured Brewer.

To use her handkerchief, Adelina reclaimed her hand.

"Barney says not," she answered. "Mr. Brewer, the child had to tell it! They made him! He says Patricia was going to ask you about a man you know in the District Attorney's Office."

Finally, "Patrick O'Kelleron's there," he admitted reluctantly.

"O'Kelleron," she repeated. "Yes, yes, I remember now. I thought—I mean Patricia told Barney when the lawyers were trying to make Mike confess, that, perhaps, when you came home, you'd ask Mr. O'Kelleron to do something—something for us. Couldn't I talk to him? I could make him see right off that Michael's innocent. He's a good friend of yours, isn't he?"

While Brewer restlessly smoothed his furrowed brow the image of another boy, his Benny, changed places with the King of the Pepperdays. The picture of the powerful, red-haired O'Kelleron standing over his invalid son fastened itself sickeningly on his mind.

"Yes, he is! He sure is," he said in desperation, "and I'll speak to him myself if you want me to. I think it would be wiser for me to do it. It might not do any good, but, of course, I'll try. Anyhow, we'll get good counsel for Mike. Even if they try him, they won't find him guilty."

"But appearances are so against him," mourned Aunt Addie in a far-off tone. "I hear he and Mr. Brown weren't—weren't good friends. If that's true, the trouble wasn't started by my boy, and no one can make me believe it was. That pencil—the dreadful little gold thing!" Then her faltering accents ceased in a spell of lamentation. When she was able, she began where she had left off: "Michael loved it, that pencil! I—I—bought it for him out of my butter and egg money. Oh, if I hadn't! If I only hadn't! He says he loaned it to Mr. Brown, but nobody believes him but—but us."

"How about his mother? Does she know?" asked Martin.

"No, she doesn't, and it won't be easy to keep it from Charlotte, even if she is blind. She hasn't been

so well lately, and the doctor forbade Madison telling her — this. Mr. Brewer, won't you go down to the Tombs? We'll have him out in a jiffy if he'll — Tell him we'll all die! Tell him — Oh, tell him anything to open his mouth. Perhaps, he'll talk to you."

As she rose to her feet, a wave of nauseating fear rushed over Brewer. If Michael Pepperday had not killed Fatty Brown, who had? Was it Benny? As much to divert his mind from his son's danger as anything, he said, rising:

"Listen, Aunt Addie! I'll try and see Pat O'Kelleron. He's out of town now, but I'll nail him the minute he gets back. Then I'll let you know what he says. . . . Yes, I'll 'phone you at Balmville, and I'll drive down and see Mike some time this afternoon."

CHAPTER XI

LIKE a jack-in-the-box, Benny Brewer was curled up before an open window in his studio. He looked out over the bleak roofs, then stared down upon the shining pavements below him. It was shivering cold, but he did not care about that in the least. He was trying to gather courage to fall out and forget. In his hand he held some tattered pieces of paper, the contents of which he had learned by heart, words that stuck in his throat like fish bones when he tried to pronounce them aloud, words that had been written by the one man he loved and trusted.

His father had deceived him; the letters were proof of that!

When Brewer softly opened the door, Benny was still there. The lad gave him one soul-dissecting look and turned back to the window.

"Benny," Martin hazarded, "Benny, dear boy, the train was late, and I had to go to the office before coming home. What—what's the matter?"

"Nothing! Go away! Go now!"

"Look at me!"

The low, commanding voice brought Benny's head around, but instantly his gaze was again intent on the sky line.

"God!" muttered Brewer between his teeth. "Son," he burst out, "were you at Cavendish's the night Fatty Funny Breeches was murdered?"

Benny cowered as if from a blow.

"Don't ask me," he snarled, his face the color of wood ashes. "It's none of your business."

No further corroboration of Billy Foster's story was necessary. Martin's vivid imagination added dreadful details to the picture that had begun to shape itself darkly in his mind at noon time. He frowned and set his teeth. The law should not lay its heavy hand upon his son. He would fight the boy's enemies to the last ditch.

"Well, if you were there," he faltered, slumping down into a chair, "I want you to tell me all about it."

Their eyes sparred a moment in silence. Then the lad laughed, a weird laugh that was more like a scream than any other sound.

"Tell you?" he cried, swaying his body forward. "I'll cut my tongue out first! Go away, and never come back! You'd like to find something to give me hell for, wouldn't you?"

A premonition of impending evil assailed Brewer. The very roots of his hair quivered and tightened as if a powerful hand were tugging at his scalp.

"Benny boy," he exclaimed. "Child! What do you mean by that? Have you seen in the papers that Michael Pepperday has been arrested for — for murder?"

If Benny had not kept his face to the window, Martin would have noticed his speechless, shocked surprise. However, the expression changed instantly to moroseness, for after all the lad's interest was limited to Michael's sister.

"Have you seen Paddy to-day?" he growled.

Martin had just decided he would not speak of Patricia's illness.

"No—no, I haven't," he said.

A small ease crept about Benny's aching heart. Then his eyes fell upon the letter he held. The wrong he thought his father had done obliterated every consideration external to himself.

As he glanced at Martin, the man ejaculated a word

under his breath. The ghastly experience at Cavendish's had changed his son from a soulful human being to a surly animal.

"Benny," he implored, "son dear! "

"Don't 'Son dear!' me," said Benny sharply. "I tell you I know now that you are a hypocrite! And I've always trusted you, always believed every word you said!—Some joke! So funny I have to laugh!" and a hysterical cackle dammed the torrent of his speech until it overflowed in a new outburst. "While you were away, I was lonesome, and I went down to your den because I wanted to pretend you were home." He winked back the tears. "And I found a copy of a letter you wrote Lady Pat, just two bits of it, that's all. I know now what you think of me. I've read your own words describing just how I look here—and here—and here."

He lifted one thin leg and spatted it with his long finger; his right hand rapped his hollowed-in chest, while the left went to his shoulders.

Bewilderment swept over Brewer's face.

"Letter? What letter?" he demanded. "Child, you're crazy! "

In passionate anger Benny bounded to the floor.

"I'm not so crazy as you were when you thought you could fool me," he retorted. "You're so dog-sick of having me around you wrote it here." He tapped the letter. "Well," he choked, "I'll be dead soon, and I suppose you'll be glad."

Martin caught him by the arm.

"Stop," he cried. "Stop instantly, and listen to me! "

"I won't stop," flared Benny, wagging his head and trying to free himself. "Let me go, or, when you do, something will happen. Take your hands off of me! "

Flinching as if he had been struck with a stick, Brewer relaxed his fingers, and Benny slid away. He crawled

again to the window seat and perched himself in the open window. From there he frowned back on his mute father.

"Just stay where you are, and don't come any nearer," he hissed. "I'll read you something you never intended me to see."

"Get down into a chair, then," said Martin persuasively, "and I'll listen to it."

"You'll listen with me right here," retorted Benny. "When I think how I've believed in you all my life, how I've thought you were sorry for me, and—and—that you loved—me!"

He was tottering on the very edge of the window sill, and the frozen man, watching him, scarcely dared breathe, nor dared his agonized heart express to his distracted child one iota of its affection for him. Tears slowly filled his eyes, spilled over his twitching lids and fell in splashes down his shirt front.

"I'm glad you can cry," came to him in mocking tones. "I can't—any—more! Hear this!"

And Benny held up a torn fragment of paper.

"I found it in the waste basket," he announced, waving it in defiance, "and it starts, 'Dear Paddy!'"

Then he threw the scrap on the floor, and, spreading out another, he began to read:

"'Benny is so ill most of the time that his life is a burden to him. He's getting thinner and thinner every day. I often wonder how his legs are strong enough to carry him about. The trouble in his spine often makes him very miserable and quite useless—'

"You needn't have told her I was useless," the young reader gulped. "I'm not—quite that! I—I can play better than any one you know. But—but here's more!

"'It's impossible for him to marry in the condition he's in; you can see that for yourself —'"

As white as Benny had been, his tortured young face grew even more so, and his colorless lips tightened over his even white teeth.

"I'll bet she told you she'd marry me, and you said, 'No,'" he muttered, coughing. "What'd you tell her I was useless for? Why'd you make me out worse'n I am?"

"I didn't tell her you were useless," Brewer contradicted, his face bathed in sweat.

"It's here," Benny insisted, flourishing the letter. "Can't I believe my own eyes? I can read, can't I? And before I kill myself, I want you to know that I'm doing it because I'm in your way. After I'm gone, you can marry Lady Pat and forget all about me."

"Benny," thrust in Brewer, "let me speak one word, please!"

"I hate the sound of your voice," was flung back at him.

"But at least you'll hear me," insisted Martin. "Since the day I picked you up so hurt —"

"All twisted forever," burst in Benny.

"Since that day," continued Brewer, "I've loved every breath you've drawn. And—and I did not write those words to Patricia Pepperday, that I swear. I started a letter to her the day I left for Chicago but decided not to send it. But it wasn't a love letter, you can believe that! You've evidently found bits of two letters."

"Then—who—who did you tell I was useless?" asked Benny hesitantly, as if he would fain believe the stout denial.

"I wrote Doctor Percy Blair about you, Ben," answered Brewer. "You heard Patrick O'Kelleron speak of him yourself. I wrote him to come and see you. Clearly you didn't find that part of the copy of his letter and only the beginning of Paddy's. I tried to explain all I could so the doctor would understand your case. But I kept

the fact that I had written him from you because of the fuss you made about it, because I didn't want you to be nervous before the time came.

Then the habit of a lifetime grew stronger in the man. He lived but to gratify his son's wishes.

"Now, hear me while I tell you the rest, Ben! You're going to be as strong as any boy living. If other backs have been straightened, so can yours. And this—this I promise you, son. You shall have Patricia Pepperday—if—if—" He almost said, "if she gets well," but checked himself. "I swear on my life," he went on hurriedly, "that in some way she shall be induced to marry you. Now, will you trust me—and love me,—boy, boy mine?"

Benny's anger died abruptly as his father took that mighty oath.

"Daddy," he whispered, and Brewer caught him up.

CHAPTER XII

"OF course, Alex, I suppose you'll do as you want to in spite of anything I say," expostulated Mrs. Clark, "but I warn you not to try Patrick too far. He's very much like his father, and I know him better than you do. I don't want to seem to scold, my dear, but he's losing patience. I know by his looks every time you've asked him for money."

This admonition was bestowed upon Alexander Clark one day by his wife, Nancy, when the two were waiting in her boudoir for her son. If there was one thing above another she disliked to do, it was to remonstrate with her ornamental husband, but this time she realized it was the lesser of two evils. As she had stated, she was well acquainted with the idiosyncracies of her big, red-headed Patrick.

There were no truer words ever spoken by Nancy Clark than that her second life-mate, who but a few years back she had tagged as her own private property, was handsome. Upward toward his slightly distended nostrils curled a mustache a king might have envied. In relation to it was a carefully cut Vandyke which was the secret pride of its owner's existence. Once Nancy had dissolved into highly incensed tears when her idolized Patrick had pronounced Alexander's beautiful beard, "a dizzy bunch of whiskers" which, so the young man had grinningly asserted, "I'd enjoy *non-esting* with the dog clippers."

Although Mr. Clark's figure had lost some of its youthfulness under luxurious living, he was still a man in whose possessorship any woman might exult.

And Alexander's eyes! Ah, how darkly they flashed in certain moods, how dreamy in others!

However, Nancy had been educated in a bitter school. She had learned that the softer spoken her spouse, the gentler his rare countenance, the greater her danger. Twice, smilingly, he had pinched her black and blue, and once, when she refused him a jewel to pawn, he had donned sackcloth and ashes because he had been compelled to tweak her ear almost off.

Now, a melting tenderness draped him like a holy mantle and covered, as Nancy fathomed, a boiling cauldron of temper. But Patrick would be here any moment, and she gasped with gratitude as she thought of it.

"Tut, tut, my loved one," he admonished in a voice as smooth as shimmering satin, "you do your splendid Pat a wrong by entertaining such a notion. In my opinion he's got little to grouch about. Why, before he went away two weeks ago, he let me have a thousand dollars, and yesterday, when he came back, he didn't mention giving me any more, so I just took the bull by the horns —"

"And I let you have a thousand last week," put in Nancy. "That was his money, too."

"But, darling, what of that?" asked Clark. "You're his mother, Nan dear, and I'm your own devoted husband. Outside of that, Pat's one of the richest young men in New York. Now, why shouldn't you and I have what money we want to spend?"

"Patrick says you squander too much," answered the woman, "and I'm sure he's very generous. We use his magnificent homes quite as if they were our own, Alex."

"And why not, my sweet?" he purred. "Who's got a better right? But I firmly believe, Nancy, and always have, if the truth were known, half of what he has ought to be yours."

"That's nonsense, and you know it," she retorted. "Until Patrick's Uncle John died and left him his fortune, we were comparatively poor. John wasn't my brother. He was my first husband's brother. I've told you that again and again, and it doesn't set very well to hear you constantly hinting that my boy isn't honest. . . . You say Pat humiliates you, but you've got to stand it unless you go into business for yourself. . . . I wish you would, Alex."

After crumpling the lighted end of a cigarette into an ash tray thoughtfully, Clark turned on his wife with a brilliant smile.

"Well, I couldn't do that," he said. "I'm too busy to spend my life sweating at a desk. I've other uses for my time."

"Well, what *do* you do with your time?" questioned Nancy in a quiver. "You don't spend much of it with me."

"God forbid!" whispered Clark to his artistic soul.

It was a relief to both husband and wife when Patrick O'Kelleron walked into the room.

As he kissed his mother affectionately, she recounted to herself for the millionth time the glories of him, her mighty son, whose footprints she could have kissed from sheer adoration. Often she wondered from whom he had inherited that crop of red curls and the glistening brown of his eyes; not from her and surely not from his father. At this moment she winced a bit as by a quick glance she compared him with Alexander. If an open rupture came between the two, it was evident that, metaphorically speaking, her husband would be ground into the dust.

"Hello, mater mine," smiled Patrick. "I came up as soon as I could. I wasn't in the office when your message came in."

A flush rose to Mrs. Clark's brow.

"Alex 'phoned you, Paddy, I didn't," she said crossly. "I'm never so much in need that I can't wait until you get home."

"What's up?" asked O'Kelleron, turning to his step-father.

Alexander screwed his waxed mustachio nervously. This young man awed him whenever he was in his presence.

"It was ridiculous, Alex's sending for you, Patsy!" exclaimed Mrs. Clark. "If he hadn't been in bed this morning when you left the house, you'd have been saved this trip."

"No matter, mommy," Patrick consoled her good-naturedly. "I had to come uptown, anyway. One of Brewer's protégés is in serious trouble,—a young actor,—Michael Pepperday. Things look pretty bad for him, and the worst of it is I've got to try him. Martin wants to see me about him."

"You know I don't approve of Mr. Brewer, Patrick," said Mrs. Clark with a tightening of her thin lips. "He has no sympathy from me, nor any of that set of actors associated with him. You've heard that from me before, Paddy. They all go directly against the Bible. 'An eye for an eye' is the motto of the 'Welfare League.'"

Patrick laughed. Then he noted her pained expression and became suddenly grave. It was not worth the candle to argue with his strictly conventional mother on the morals of men, nor did he desire to hurt her feelings.

"Well, live and let live, *ma petite*," he remarked enigmatically. "Everybody has his own row to hoe. . . . But now to business! Mother dear, I'd like to talk with your husband alone a few minutes."

But that did not agree with Alexander's notions at all. He returned his wife's glance with a pleading smile

and a slight shake of his head. Notwithstanding, that lady, desirous to escape the discussion she knew was coming, arose and swept out of the room.

"Now what is it, Alex?" demanded Patrick as soon as the door was closed. "I'm in a hurry; Brewer's waiting for me at his office."

"I dislike to speak of gross matters, dear boy," murmured Clark, "but—but I need—need some money!"

"I gave you a thousand dollars two weeks ago. That can't be all gone! Say, Alex, what do you do with all the cash I send your way? I didn't want to hurt mother by mentioning it before her, but I heard, quite by accident—from Eddie Blake if you want to know—that you've been teeing and dining with that Foster girl who was playing at the Hypo not long ago. It's an insult to my mother for you to be running around with Broadway chickens. You're at the end of your tether, Alexander. Now, what do you mean by such conduct?"

A smoldering hate against his independent, impudent stepson flamed up in Clark, a wave of revolt. He flushed crimson. What were the few paltry thousands which found their way into his pockets from the O'Kelleron bank account in comparison with the wealth that lay behind?

"I put a little money into the Foster act, Paddy," he excused finally, "and Brown's murder made it necessary for me to see Miss Foster."

Disbelief darkened O'Kelleron's face, and he shrugged his great shoulders.

"Better keep out of the theatrical business," he warned sharply. "You'll get stung every time, and I advise you to keep away from the *thé dansants*, too. I simply won't have my mother held up to ridicule, so mind that. She's too good a woman to be made a laughing stock of."

Preparing to leave, he picked up his driving gloves.

"Wait a minute, Pat," pleaded Clark. "I understand all you say about your mother, and I know how you feel about it. She's an exquisite woman, but at times she's difficult to live with."

O'Kelleron's ruddy face paled with rising ire.

"If she had a decent husband, she'd be all right!" was his bitter reply. "I don't find it hard to get along with her, nor any one else I ever heard of. Her servants stay with her until they drop in their tracks. She tells me you're gone from the time you get up till almost morning, and that you resent her trying to find out what you do and where you go. I'm positive you're not even polite to her when I'm not about, much less affectionate. What do you expect of a wife, I'd like to know. These aren't cave days, my dear Alex."

Mr. Clark made no immediate answer. So then, Nancy had been telling tales out of school! If this enormous hulk of a son of hers was not standing in the way, he would make her sorry for that, be damned if he wouldn't!

"It's almost impossible for me to stay home, Pat, Nancy nags at me so much," he complained presently. "I can't have a minute's peace. She and I'd be much more companionable if I had a stated allowance."

"And you want me to settle one on you, is that it?" interjected O'Kelleron.

"Yes!" came eagerly, "Yes, Patrick! Money's the bone of contention between your mother and me. She thinks I do you an injustice."

"You certainly do her one," shot back Patrick, "and you might as well get it in your head now, as any other time, that I don't believe one word you say, not a word. You've promised over and over to let booze alone, and—and to treat my mother decently, but I don't see you doing either. I hold some twenty-five thousand dollars' worth of your notes without a chance of ever getting the

money back. If mother benefited by it, I wouldn't mind, but she doesn't. From now on —" He slapped his gloves into the palm of his left hand with a smack. "From now on," he repeated, "you'll take your stipend from her. Perhaps, if she holds the purse strings, she'll come up in your estimation. And, believe me, Clark, I'll watch for every change in her expression, and, if I see she's unhappy, I'll come down on you like a thousand of brick!"

Then he strode to the door, and Alexander heard the horn of Patrick's high-powered motor before he realized what had happened.

CHAPTER XIII

"You mustn't electrocute Michael, Patrick," cried Martin Brewer sharply.

O'Kelleron paused on his way to the door.

"That remains to be seen, Mart," he stated. "As I've told you, Pepperday can't be coaxed or bulldozed into saying a word. I'm sorry to hurt your feelings, old man, but I must repeat that he's guilty. There's no doubt about that in my mind. Still, if he'd talk, things wouldn't look so bad for him."

Drops of water pricked Brewer's brow and upper lip. "God save 'em!" boomed through his brain, as if a hammer had knocked off each letter. His pet slogan he changed to "God save Michael!" as O'Kelleron went out.

The instant the door closed behind him, Martin lunged toward it. He had not clean-breasted himself of the offense of shielding a possible criminal. Patrick must know what he knew. Michael must have a chance, and Benny must take his. But neither lad could stand up under O'Kelleron's tremendous pressure as a prosecutor! So, instead of opening the door, Martin slunk back and weakly slid into a chair. He was more than cowardly, worse than Benny a thousand times. Benny was sick, afraid, young.

He leaned heavily over his desk. He did not even twiddle his thumbs. He had committed himself to the first dishonorable act of his life. His peace of mind was gone, and nothing could restore it. He tried to pray and succeeded only in a dull repetition, "God save Michael! God save Michael!"

There came a knock on the door, and instantly Martin

sat up. His pride would not allow him to parade his tribulation before his office staff.

"What is it, Scott?" he asked, coughing slightly as his secretary stepped into the room.

"There's a girl outside, sir, and she wants to see you," was the reply.

Martin frowned. To talk "God bless 'em! God save 'em" at that moment,— he could not do it! Yet, as he was a man unready with excuses, he hesitated.

"How does she look?" he questioned lamely.

"Rather sad, sir!"

"Then give her twenty-five dollars, Scott, and get her address. Tell her to come again in a day or two. Tell her not to worry if she can help it; and, by the way, Claude, when you give her the money, smile at her, will you?"

"Smile at her!" was what he had ordered of his secretary. He had quoted it as a matter of habit, mechanically and without a semblance of thought that any one could be joyful in the world. He, Martin Brewer, promoter of happiness, knew now what it meant not to have a smile to call upon.

The secretary's reappearance brought him to his feet.

"She didn't want money, sir," he explained, "and she wouldn't go away, either. I even offered her fifty dollars, knowing you'd approve. She wants to see you."

"Bring her in then," said Brewer.

He was still standing when a young girl entered. During the moment they surveyed each other, it flashed across him that here was an applicant for theatrical work, the type Broadway receives with open arms. Dozens such, with the same petiteness, the same fair skin and charm, had received their stage impetus from him.

"How do you do?" he remarked, assuming a professional air. "Getting colder, isn't it?"

Until the door was closed, she did not speak.

"I had to see you, Mr. Brewer," she apologized, and immediately he changed his mind as to the cause of her visit.

"All right," he responded, "you're seeing me now, aren't you? What's your name?"

"Flossie Baker!"

"Very well, Flossie! Sit down, and unburden your soul."

"You—you help women?" she questioned in confusion.

Ah! It *was* a bit out of his "God save 'em!" then!

"Yes," he nodded, "that's the best part of my business."

"Will you help me—a little—oh, just a little?"

"Certainly, but you needn't cry. Everything comes out in the wash! Nothing's ever so bad it can't be worse, my girl!"

He forgot in his sympathy for the weeping young thing that his own matters were quite as hopeless as they could possibly be.

"I'm in dreadful trouble," she murmured under her breath.

She sat nervously on the very edge of her chair, her gloved fingers clasped together.

"I've been on the stage," she told him presently as if in excuse.

"You look it," was all Brewer said.

"I can't go through with it! I can't! I can't!" she broke forth. "Everybody says you're angelic to women. Do help me! Please, please! I haven't a friend in the world to go to."

Martin lifted a paper weight from one pile of papers and laid it down on another for no reason whatever.

"Tell me more," he said, his head bowed.

"He—he said it was all my fault—that—that I— Oh, Mr. Brewer, I've a lovely mother!"

"Heaven's blessed you so far then," Martin exclaimed. "Be thankful for that!"

"But she's proud—so proud of me!"

"Sure she is, and she has a right to be," fell softly from his lips.

"But you don't understand," she pointed out feverishly. "I've been wicked—and—and I can't bear the consequences. I can't for my mother's sake. She believes in me; she thinks I'm good."

"So you are," said Martin with force.

"No, no, don't try to comfort me! You want to make me happier. I can see that, but I'm so miserable! If—if Eddie had married me, as he promised, I'd have loved it, but —"

"You'll love *it* just the same," insisted Brewer sharply. "Love's love wherever you find it, Flossie." Then, with his usual perspicacity, he struck at a nail the head of which was not visible to his material sight. "But I'm afraid Eddie Blake hasn't much love in his make-up, but you never can tell."

With a long, troubled look she searched his face.

"I—I didn't mean to speak his name," she said, anguished. "He'd be so angry, and I—I—I love him so, I don't want to hurt him! You won't ever tell, you won't I know, but —"

"I wouldn't hurt Eddie for the world, Flossie," Brewer assured her. "Of course, you love him, and love doesn't go amiss wherever it's sent; remember that!"

"Now, will you please listen to me while I talk to you a few minutes, and keep in mind I'm going to help you?"

"Yes!" The lovely head was bowed low, and the twitching face hid its shame.

"Always—always, child," the manager imparted in gentle solemnity, "I've looked upon killing as heaven-damned, and I can't countenance it now. Why, I can't

stand a fly swatter in my house. I say: Keep so clean the pests won't want to come in. I believe in conserving life wherever you find it, Flossie."

"Then you won't help me," she cried, rising in terror. "The way you talk means you won't."

"It means nothing of the sort. No, don't shake like a leaf, kid. Sit down, and take it easy for a spell."

As though all hope in life had departed, she sank into the chair.

Brewer's one-track mind busied itself with the girl's situation. She was whimpering behind her handkerchief, but no thought of rebuke entered his head. The handsome Blake and his ambitions rode side by side with Flossie's need.

"I suppose your mother wouldn't be sorry if you were married, would she, Flossie?" he said at length.

"No, of course, not," she answered, staring at him through her tears. "She's often said so. Why?"

His strong, kindly face kindled with a flickering smile.

"Then get married," he said swiftly. "You don't have to show up Eddie Blake just because you wear a wedding ring. Poor child, you've been treated pretty damned rough, haven't you? But never mind, we'll pull you through. With my consent you won't commit murder, not by a long shot. But—but you'll wear a ring which'll tell your mother you've a right to have a baby if you want it; and it'll be the kind of a ring, too, that'll make her open her eyes. Understand, Flossie?"

"Yes, I've thought of that, too," she mourned, "but I didn't have money enough to do it. It would take such a lot."

As the moments advanced, Brewer's spirits rose. There was nothing like the "God save 'em!" to buck a fellow up. And what was more, he believed the doctrine he preached: That, unless he put out his strong arm,

this vital young creature would be blasted by a code she did not understand.

"Now, look at it this way," he continued after a while. "The shortest way round is the easiest way there. Go home to your mother, like a good girl. Mothers are the best souls in the world anyway, and don't make the mistake of thinking otherwise, Flossie. And—and, when you are yourself again, come back to Broadway, and I'll give you a chance on the stage that'll make my smart Eddie boy wish he'd played the game straight."

Moved by great emotion, she declared:

"I never — never can thank you — enough! I don't know how — to —" A slight negative shake of the exquisite head was followed by, "Tell me what to say, please!"

"Why, God bless your soul, Flossie, you don't need to thank me! I don't want thanks! Now, we'll fix this thing up, or at least make a start." He slipped his hand into his pocket and drew out a roll of bills and stripped off two of large denomination. "Trot over to Tiffany's, and buy a wedding ring with that, a jim-cracker!

"And don't argue about it," he told her, noticing her stupefied incredulity. "Just do it! Come back here tomorrow morning — let me see — at ten-thirty. Wad this into your pocketbook, and let me steer you for a day or two—and—say, girl, smile, can't you?"

She stood up, a wan little smile touching the corners of her lips; but in her eyes there still remained that eternal expression of woe that will rest in women's eyes as long as women are women and some men are what they are.

CHAPTER XIV

"MR. BLAKE'S waiting for you, sir," Martin was informed, as promptly at ten o'clock the next morning, he strode into his office.

A slight grimace creased the skin about his lids and lips.

"Good," he ejaculated, "and, Scott, when that girl comes in, the one who wouldn't take the fifty yesterday, just give me a call."

He went into his private office and found the alderman stretched out in an easy chair.

"Hello, Eddie," he sang out jovially. "Thanks for being here on time. How's how? All right?"

While he was speaking, he took off his coat and hat.

"I'm finer'n silk," responded Blake with a smiling nod. "Couldn't be better, Mart! It looks from my place in the road as if I'd land that judgeship. It's a long wait till next fall, though. Say, that O'Kelleron is as clever as they make 'em! I'll wager a fat roll I'll be governor of this State, too, with both of you to help me, before I'm done."

"So?" came Brewer's meditative reply.

"Yes, siree, old man," asserted Blake. "I'm the ambitious fellow, you can bet what you like on that."

Brewer made an elaborate circle to reach his swivel chair. He drew a cigar from his pocket, lighted it and sat down. Then seemingly he gave his whole attention to the weed. He drew on it, smacking his lips as though he were thoroughly enjoying himself. He looked at the glowing end and blew gently upon it. Meanwhile his expression was as blank as a stone wall.

Of a sudden he jabbed the cigar between his molar teeth, cocked his feet on the table, and only then did he center upon Blake a long, piercing look.

"So!" he repeated in exclamation. "Ambition, rightly directed, is a great thing in this world."

"I find it so," ruminated the other. "And my future plans are not all selfish. I intend to marry Patricia Pepperday."

One inch from the butt of Martin's cigar was almost crunched off as it rocked under the set of his heavy jaw.

"She'll change her mind when she gets better," continued Blake easily.

"She refused you, then?" asked Martin in far-off tones.

"Yes! I approached her the wrong way, that was the trouble. But you know how changeable women are. Like the wind! She has huge respect for you, though. I wish now I'd told her of your approval."

The speaker was restrained suddenly from finishing his sentence by the frigid attitude and steady stare of his companion.

"What's the matter, Mart?" he questioned with bated breath.

"Well, Eddie," began Brewer, "I'm devilish sorry to smash any of your carefully thought-out plans, but I'm out with a brass band against you."

As if he were going to speak, Blake's mouth fell open, but he was struck dumb.

"Bassoon, double bassoon and all," rumbled out alongside the manager's mutilated cigar.

"What?" exclaimed Blake, growing crimson.

"When you first talked to me about what you wanted, Ed," the older man proceeded slowly, "I had it in mind to stand by you—well, not because I like you particularly, but you—you had a dandy father, and he and I were friends. I wanted to see his son advance, by Jove. I

did! And, if I could lend a hand, I'd do it. But that was before I knew about—about Flossie Baker!"

He laid down his cigar, his thumbs beginning their whipping race about each other.

"Well, for God's sake," sprang from Blake's lips.

"'Tis sort of funny, Eddie, isn't it? — that I manage to get my thumb in most folks' pie," Brewer said with a wry twist of his lips; "but I'm in yours, and I'm in for the big plum. See?"

To abstain from a string of ripping oaths, Blake bit the inside of his cheek. It occurred to him all at once that he could not measure strength with the man before him. From the Battery to the Bronx, Martin Brewer was known and loved.

"What do you want me to do?" the lawyer muttered.

"Do?" exploded Brewer. "Hell, what does any decent man do under the circumstances? At that it'll depend on Flossie whether I drum you out of New York or not. If she's willing to marry you, I'll glue myself to the back seat of the hack and let you drive pell-mell. You'll smash up sooner or later without any help from me. And if I decide to let you alone, you can thank the good God who made you!"

Never before had Blake's ego received such a shock. He jumped to his feet and took a couple of plunging turns up and down the room.

With a sense of satisfaction Martin watched him from under his heavy brows. There was nothing he enjoyed so royally as squeezing flat a fellow, like Blake, when he had brought to light some bad intent. If he had not been enduring the pangs of the damned himself, he would have laughed outright.

"But, Mart," exclaimed the alderman, halting abruptly, "listen to a little reason, will you? You know very well, if I marry Floss, no good will come of it. Such marriages

never go. Anyhow, you can't insist on it now you know how I feel about—about some one else. I was drunk most of the time I played around with—with Miss Baker and don't care a rap of my finger about her."

"So I was given to understand, Eddie," Martin rejoined, "but that doesn't count for a damn with me. Of course, I can't make you marry Flossie,— but I can break you in New York or anywhere else you might want to go. Before I'm finished with you, you'll smell to high heaven; even the angels will hold their noses."

He boomed out the last words, his fist thumping his chair arm.

"I say, quit it, Mart," begged Blake, going limp. "What's the use? A fellow will be a fellow once in a while. But you've got me in the net, and I'll do what you say, but I simply—can't live with her. Don't ask me to do that."

"God forbid," cried Brewer. "I couldn't wish on the pretty child such a life as you'd lead her. But, if you want me to hold my tongue, you must marry her. She'll go home to her mother, poor girl, the happier, I hope, but you'll have to treat her pretty well to get her consent, if I am not mistaken. If she refuses, then I'm thumbs down."

"Ugh! To hell with women," burst from Blake.

Brewer laughed.

"Eddie," he said whimsically, "hell's a place that never yet saw a woman and won't so long as the Almighty keeps up that institution. A woman—why, a woman can't do a deed on this footstool that she isn't forgiven before she starts in. Hell—" He paused in thought, a shadow falling across his fine countenance, "hell," he reiterated, "was made needful by just such men as you and—and me."

The telephone tinkled at his elbow, and he took off

the receiver and placed it to his ear with a sigh.

"All right, send her in," he ordered, and then, eyeing the cringing lawyer, he informed him, "Flossie's on her way in. My dear *Judge*, if you'll be so kind as to step into my directors' room, out of the way a minute, I'll be ever so much obliged, — damn you!"

Miss Baker came in shyly, and Brewer took quick note that she was not crying. On the contrary she looked extraordinarily like a timorous child.

"Good morning, Flossie," he greeted her easily, rising. "Feeling better?"

"I've got it! See!" she twittered, holding out her hand. "You gave me enough money to get one with diamonds around it. Isn't it the cutest thing?"

He turned the ring around several times.

"Splendid," he approved. "Diamonds are none too good for you, my dear! Now sit down, and let's go over a few things together."

He waved her to a chair and then reseated himself.

"I was wondering, Flossie," he observed after a moment's consideration, "if you'd consent to marry Eddie Blake. It's a big thing to ask, I know, but I'd like you to think about it."

She was so taken aback by the question that she could not speak for a space. Tears brimmed over her lids and ran down her cheeks, unheeded. Then,

"Of course, I'd love it, Mr. Brewer," she sobbed, "but he wouldn't marry me. He told me so over and over. I begged him to,—but—but he loves some one else."

"Eddie," called Brewer, and Edward Blake's big frame loomed in the doorway at the speaker's side.

When the girl saw him she went death-white.

"There she is, Ed," Brewer thundered. "Now ask her what she wants to do."

He whirled his chair completely around, so that his

back was to them. Behind him he heard a man's hoarse whispers and a girl's hesitating replies. But he twiddled his thumbs and looked out of the window and watched a flock of pigeons rise from a loft over near Ninth Avenue, circle hither and yon, up and down, wheeling and turning together, then settle back to their feeding.

"Mart," Blake's voice came to him in smothered tones, "Miss Baker—has—consented to marry me!"

"Good for her," laughed Brewer, springing to his feet. "You're a lucky man, Ed, in more ways than one. And I suppose now's as good a time as any for the knot to be tied. . . . But, Eddie, before you go, just come over here and make out a check for your wife's wedding ring. In my opinion she showed mighty good taste in picking it out."

During the next few moments only the scratch of Blake's pen was heard.

"I'll just drive you down to the City Hall myself if you don't mind, Edward," chuckled Brewer. "I haven't officiated as best man at a wedding in a blue moon. But—but, upon my word, the first thing I want to do is—is to congratulate you,—*Judge*—Blake."

CHAPTER XV

THERE came a night when Martin Brewer made no pretense of going to bed. In fact, ever since Michael Pepperday's trial had been in session, he had succumbed to sleep only through sheer fatigue. Taking no account of the hours, he had watched daily the slow, relentless progress of the State in its efforts to enmesh the boy ever closer in a thicket of damning circumstances.

He paced his room in a purgatory of anguish, praying desperately at times and at others declaring with clenched fists that by no act of his should Benny be endangered. Away from his son, he insisted to himself he was a dear innocent; in his capricious presence, he was not so certain.

With the coming of the cold, gray, October dawn, Martin bathed, dressed, swallowed a cup of coffee and sat down to wait until the world was astir.

Presently, somewhere beyond in the city, a church bell began to toll the hour. Aloud, Martin counted each ding-dong monotonously, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight." Then, with an audible groan, he arose and climbed to Benny's apartment.

"What's happened—huh?" queried Benny drowsily, when his father appeared at his bedside. "It's early yet, isn't it, dad? Patricia —"

"There's been no news about her since last night," interrupted Martin, sitting down weightily. "I should have heard, son, if she'd been worse. Michael's trial will end to-day—and—and every bit of the evidence is against him, too."

Benny dropped back on his pillow.

"Will they kill him, do you suppose?" he shuddered.

"Perhaps," offered Brewer, and that was all.

It seemed an endless stretch of time before he could loosen his throat muscles sufficiently to speak again.

"Benny," he said finally, leaning over and laying his hand on the boy's hot brow, "son, could you brace up a minute and tell your old dad why you went to Cavendish's that night?"

Wearily Benny's lids came together, and his boyish face assumed an expression of pallid remoteness as though his spirit were gradually leaving its house of clay.

"Benny," Brewer said indistinctly. "Benny, lad, look at me."

"I don't want to look at you," wailed Benny. "I'd rather you'd leave me alone. I'll never tell about Cavendish's as long as I live, so don't ask me any more."

"But, boy, you *must* tell me," interjected Brewer fiercely. "I want to know everything that happened that night."

"Oh, can't you let me be? My head aches, my back aches, and I'm sick all over."

Then he burst into a spasm of weeping, and Martin, unable to bear the sight, stretched his big frame beside the lad, put his arms under his heaving shoulders and pressed his son's head against his breast.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine! Another sixty minutes, long second by long second, had gone into eternal time. Benny was asleep as his father crept away, to begin anew his fight with himself, to endure again the agony of mind that each day now meant to him, as he watched and listened to O'Kelleron's prosecution of Michael.

From his position in the center of the courtroom Martin Brewer could plainly see each solemn juror's face. He looked at them most of the time. They fascinated him,—that row of silent, attentive men.

On his way to the District Attorney's table, Patrick O'Kelleron stopped and shook hands with him. After the lawyer had walked away, Martin wished he had whispered a word in his ear in favor of the youthful prisoner. He glanced around the room speculatively.

Another sun-up would bring to Michael—what? His gaze rested on the silvered head of Madison Pepperday, who, gaunt, thin and hollow-eyed, was sitting next to his son, Barney. Martin wished he were Madison. Madison was standing by his accused boy, a royal figure of fatherhood. Madison had nothing to conceal. Madison's life was straight and aboveboard, while his own—he hardly dared think what it had become.

Perhaps, if Martin could have glimpsed the mind of the man he envied, he would have realized that every heart knows its own bitterness. For all his children's trouble Madison was blaming himself. Anxious days, spent by him trailing from Roosevelt Hospital to the Tombs, had told on his health perceptibly.

Now, for a week and three days he had been compelled to sit silently in the presence of that august judge while indefatigable men hurled anathemas at his baby, for to the father heart, Michael had gone back to the days of his babyhood.

Suffering almost beyond human ken, he had noticed the change that had come over his son after Millicent Foster had sworn that she had been with Fancy Cavenish, her brother and Edward Blake until almost daylight of the morning of the murder. After that Michael had seemed but a man of stone.

From under his dark brows, Madison looked at his sons. First at Barney,—good, old, dependable Barney! The boy's dear mouth was lined with the strain of the past few weeks. Then he gazed at Michael's beautiful face, and tears stung his aching lids. How could he go

back to his children's blind mother with the dreadful tale of her daughter's illness and her youngest son's disgrace! With his mind's eye he saw the trusting Yum-yum in Balmville, attended and protected by Aunt Addie. Because he imagined he was on the brink of insanity, Madison dragged his attention back to this important hour.

Through the veil of mist that dimmed his sight, he saw Patrick O'Kelleron rise to start the final attack that would determine weal or woe for Michael. The cold sweat on his face seemed to freeze into a layer of thin ice. He was mortally afraid of this splendid prosecutor, this Patrick O'Kelleron, with his glinting red hair, his piercing, golden-brown eyes and enormous frame. Madison's soul sank into despair as the lawyer's magnetic voice began its slow, even speech. It became as soft as a mother's whispered caress when he spoke of Arthur Brown but rose sonorously ear-splitting as he rapped denunciations against Michael.

Madison ran his shaking fingers through his thick damp hair to lift its weight from his burning skull. How his head ached! How his temples throbbed! Try as he would, he could not keep his vision clear. Even the bigness of O'Kelleron was blotted out in the clouds that swam and swirled before his eyes. It seemed as if he were floating away into a nebulous nothingness where he hung suspended—just himself and the resonance of that importunate voice! Then ringing execration struck upon his ear drum like chisel on marble.

"We can't tell you just how the killing was done," conceded O'Kelleron. "But one living man knows whether he stabbed his victim stealthily in cold blood or struck him down in the heat of conflict."

The powerful pleader turned and pointed at Michael.

"He knows," came in appalling, thunderous tones,

"that murderer! Michael Pepperday!"

The imputation seared Madison's brain like a branding iron. His own identity disappeared in the black gulf that had swallowed every one and everything but his beloved son and his cruel antagonist. A sob burst from his lips. He pulled himself to his feet, tottered forward and raised his tragic face to O'Kelleron.

"Man," he quavered, reeling, "you—you—lie!"

Barney leaped forward to his father's side; Michael partly arose, too, but an officer touched him, and he sank back again.

For what seemed a space of time hacked out of eternity, O'Kelleron stood perfectly still, his flaming eyes leveled on the grief-maddened father of the Pepperdays.

A despair as deep as the well of night overtook the Pater. Then something snapped in his head, and in spite of Barney's efforts to support him, he slumped to the floor.

CHAPTER XVI

LIFTING her heavy lids, Patricia Pepperday looked around with never so much as a movement of her muscles. Her arms, thin to emaciation, lay outside the white coverlet, her small, fleshless hands relaxed as if they had no strength to move their own weight. With her opening flush of intelligence, she regarded them as a child does when first discovering that it possesses fingers.

Then something out of a long-ago yesterday, fleeting and intangible, drifted through her mind and floated away again. Her gaze traveled across the ceiling, down the wall to a shadow, a rounded shadow just above the table where a faint light glimmered under a dark shade. She considered it without attempting to discover its origin. Then it moved, vanished, appeared again and spread into the dark outline of a man's body.

She endeavored to speak, and in the effort one of her hands raised a little, and she sighed. Her features quivered with interest as she saw some one tiptoe toward the bed. Then the person bent over her, and in recognition a slow smile touched the corners of her lips. Barney! How glad she was to see him after so many frightful nightmares that were not true at all! She wondered apathetically where Michael was. This she managed to ask, her lips straining back from her teeth.

Drawing a chair close up to the bed, Barney sat down.

"Don't talk just now, dear," he said in gentle persuasion. "After a while, perhaps, after the doctor's been here."

"But I must talk," her lips framed.

Leaning over, he kissed her cheek.

"To-morrow," he promised. "Go to sleep, now."

Too weak to repeat her request for Michael, she slept, woke up, partook of food and slept again, until the sun had risen and set six times over Roosevelt Hospital. Then one morning Barney discovered that she was contemplating him curiously.

"My head feels queer," she complained, putting her hand to her brow.

"Never mind! You've been just a—a—wee bit—sick, old thing."

"Where's Yum-yum?" was her next question.

"Living with Aunt Addie."

To the boy's astonishment she did not puzzle over this unusual circumstance.

"Is the Pater there, too?" she inquired promptly.

To hide his face as well as to simulate assent, he inclined his head.

"I want to see Michael. Where is he?"

A haunted expression crept into her sand-gray eyes, and her transparent skin became a network of wrinkles.

"I want Michael," she reiterated weakly.

As she spoke, he arose.

"Just a minute, dear," he breathed, and then he left the room.

For what seemed a decade of time, Patricia watched the door for his return; finally exhausted, she slept. A touch on her wrist awakened her. A strange man, whom she recollected having seen in many of her dark dreams, was smiling down upon her.

"Feel pretty chipper, little lady?" he queried.

"I'd—I'd like my brother, Michael," she answered feverishly. "Has Barney gone for him?"

"He sure has, and he'll fetch him along soon," was the medical man's assurance, "but you'd better trot off to sleep now."

One morning about a week later, Barney opened the door of his sister's room and stole softly in. Reproachfully she snatched his hand as he sat down. It had been so many long days since she had seen him last, and Michael had not been there, either; the Pater had not come, and every time the door had opened, she had expected to see Aunt Addie's smiling face.

"Barney darling, where've you been all this time," she choked, fumbling for her handkerchief.

"I had to go away for a while," he evaded. "You're a heap better now, the doctor says."

"Where's Michael?" she asked.

"He can't come—now," he mumbled.

"Why can't he come? Why?" she insisted. "Has he gone away with a company? Why didn't he come and see me before he left? . . . I've been terribly ill, haven't I, Barney? What made me sick?"

The muscles of Barney's throat stiffened and to relax them, he swallowed repeatedly.

"I've been trying to remember something ever since you left that day, dear," she mourned. "It's just back in my head somewhere, but—but— What made you leave me so long, Barney? I've asked everybody to get you. They always said, 'Yes, yes,' but they didn't."

Her hot, dry lips touched the back of his hand caressingly, and a sense of helplessness settled upon him. How infinitely sweet and fragile she was! Her loveliness had been enhanced by these weeks of struggle against the demons of illness who had sought to destroy her.

"Will you promise not to cry or get nervous, if I talk to you," he begged, smoothing her hair. "The doctor will root me out of here, if I make you worse."

"Yes, yes, I promise," she murmured, her lips trembling. "Barney, where's Michael? I wish you'd tell me dear. I wish you would."

She raised herself on her elbow, alertly suspicious. Her gray eyes searched his beseechingly. Barney was withholding something she ought to know.

"Pat, lie down," he entreated. "No, you can't even sit up that much. If you're not careful, you'll have me shot out of here *instantly*. Listen, honey! Yes, you must listen! That's why I had to stay away all this time. You worked yourself into a fever."

"I'm trying to remember why Michael doesn't come," she gasped, collapsing on the pillow. "That's all, Barney dear."

Tenderly he put his arms under her and held her so he could watch her face. Then,

"The King can't get here," he said huskily. "Dearie, do—do you remember—Fatty Funny Breeches?"

Patricia's lids widened in wonderment. Yes, of course, she remembered Arthur Brown! He was in the act with Babe and Billy Foster. Then, suddenly as if she were repeating a familiar fact, she said:

"Fatty Funny Breeches is dead! It seems as if—as if— Did somebody hurt—hurt Michael? Barney,—now—now I remember!"

Then the past swept through her mind, unreeling itself from resurrected memory like a picture moving across a screen.

"Paddy," he said brokenly, "the jury—O'Kelleron—Patrick O'Kelleron convicted the King."

"Oh, Barney," she breathed.

"O'Kelleron convicted the King, Paddy," he repeated. "Everybody was against Mike. But listen, Paddy! Hear what I say! He—he only got second degree, and it might have been much worse, a whole lot worse!"

The clean, white room faded from her sight. She murmured the name "Patrick O'Kelleron" several times. Ah, she had heard Martin Brewer speak of him. She

remembered his mother, too, the haughty woman who did not approve of theatrical people. But—second degree meant prison! Then Michael was in prison! She would go instantly and fetch him because he did not belong there! She struggled up as if to carry out her intention immediately.

"Paddy, dear, you mustn't act that way," Barney supplicated. "Oh, don't get down sick again. Now, if you do, we'll all go to pieces. We've taken an appeal, and—and, maybe, we'll have Mike yet. But you and I have got to turn around and begin again; we must for Yum-yum's sake. Don't look at me like that, honey! I can't stand it! It's all been most terribly awful! Be still while I tell you about it."

They were silent a few minutes after he had imparted Michael's dear messages.

"Why are Yum-yum and father living at Aunt Addie's?" asked Patricia after a while, sharply startled by a thought. "Why doesn't the Pater come to see me?" Then, noting the sorrow that swept like a storm over her brother's face, she cried, "Something's happened to the Pater, Barney, and you kept it from me!"

"He's dead! O'Kelleron killed him! O'Kelleron did that, too," he told her on a bitter breath. "That—that man's more of a murderer than the person who did for Funny Breeches, and I told him so to his face."

Then he burst into tears, and the two heartbroken young things clung to each other until the nurse came and sent Barney away.

CHAPTER XVII

THE day after Thanksgiving was sharp and briskly cold, and there were flurries of snow in the air.

From the Grand Central Station Patricia walked through Forty-second Street in the direction of Martin Brewer's offices. She regarded her surroundings as remotely foreign, much as if she were a stranger in New York. This was her first visit to the metropolis since she had been carried to Aunt Addie's home in Balmville to convalesce.

On the corner of Broadway she paused, torn with heart sickness. When last she had crossed that spot, the Pater had been with Yum-yum. Now, he was lying in the Cedar Hill Cemetery, in the marble sepulcher reared to receive the Pepperday dead. She shivered as a gust of wind swept past on its journey southward. In bitterness of spirit she reasoned that Michael would be better off alongside their father than where he was. Her king was buried alive for twenty years.

Michael had loved New York, and so had she, but how altered and gloomy it appeared after her weeks of absence. It had never occurred to her before how narrow and soiled Broadway really was, with its files of human beings racing madly around the theatrical district in pursuit of fame and fortune which now seemed to her unobtainable. Her desire to top the ladder of golden opinion had broken with Michael's incarceration. Once spirited ambitions were lifeless, and she felt oddly out of place in this world of men and women bent on their own momentous affairs.

To her New York was no longer the "City of God," made glad with music and laughter and song. Then by an association of ideas, tangled fantastically together in her vivid fancy, she likened Broadway to a monstrous, crooked vein in a sick body.

She remembered Yum-yum's injunction that morning.

"God will help us if we ask Him, Paddy dear. He knows what is best for us."

If there were a God who mixed in the affairs of men, then how unnecessarily cruel He had been! What evil thing had her father done in all his kindly life that he should be slaughtered without a moment in which to say even his prayers? Nothing! Of that she was sure! And Yum-yum! Certainly under the disciplining of Heaven, she had reaped a blank loneliness! Patricia wondered whether, if her mother knew where Michael was, or that a man walked the earth who had killed the Pater, she would still insist that there was a Heavenly Father who fitted every back to its own burden, and that underneath the Pepperdays were "the everlasting arms."

Her blood seemed to congeal as the name, "Patrick O'Kelleron," stung the tip of her tongue. She whispered it over, fury rising within her until she seemed to grow taller by inches. Oh, how tortuous hate had racked her against her father's destroyer, hate which had eclipsed the sunny laughter in her lustrous gray eyes and left within their granite depths somber shadows!

As she stood perfectly still, hopelessness as black as the inside of the tomb that had engulfed Madison Pepperday descended upon her soul. Patrick O'Kelleron was somewhere within the boundaries of this great city. He might even be within range of her vision. Her small white teeth came together savagely as she recalled Barney's reiterated recriminations:

"He's a devil, Paddy, that O'Kelleron is! When the

Pater dropped dead at his feet, his eyes were as black as coals."

Since then Patrick O'Kelleron had stood incisively in her mind as a black-eyed Lucifer, "as a roaring lion who walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

She gazed down Broadway and pictured herself facing him in her desolated daughterhood. To do that had been one of her errands into town that day; she would ask Martin Brewer to arrange the interview.

"Patricia!"

Whirling, as a voice pronounced her name, she saw Edward Blake standing at her elbow. Her lovely face went shades paler, as she regarded him steadily with a wide unflickering stare. He thrust out his hand, but she did not see it. In the trail of this man's misuse of her father had appeared Patrick O'Kelleron, the fiend incarnate. Ah, the two of them had laid out the path of evil over which the Pater had been scourged into Cedar Hill Cemetery.

"God, how sick you look, Paddy," Blake exclaimed. "You oughtn't to be out in such weather. Didn't you know any better? You'll catch your death of cold. Come up to the Claridge and have some tea."

It was then that the flood gates suddenly opened and poured the wrath of ages into her bosom. She was convulsed with primeval energy. She wanted to strike him dead. She was begging with mental swiftness that she might see him and Patrick O'Kelleron writhe in the flaming jaws of the same hell into which they had sledgehammered the Pepperdays! For them she would refine the cruel flames to the points of needle barbs! Glorious visions of demons tormented with their own torture!

Then she laughed directly into Blake's face.

"Go back to that infamous O'Kelleron," she lashed out at him, "and tell him he'll soon be where the Pater is!"

With that she turned and fled as if she were escaping a veritable Mephistopheles.

"Why, Paddy dear, you told me over the 'phone you were strong enough to come to the city," Martin Brewer charged, a frown fretting his brow, "and here I find you not only as thin as a June shad, but you look something dreadful. I ought to have run out to Balmville instead of your coming in."

Still trembling in every nerve from her encounter with Blake, she allowed Martin to place her in a chair.

"I'm perfectly all right, Martin," she murmured, "but you don't look extra well yourself. I talked a minute on the telephone with Benny last night. He asked me to come up to-day, but I said I would the next time I was in. He told me he was miserable."

To this Martin agreed with a wave of utter despondency.

"Ben never spoke a truer word," he replied, "and the worst of it is I don't know when he'll be any better. Doctor Blair, the spine specialist, examined him, and he insists the boy's nervous system must be bolstered up before an operation. Ben hates even to hear it mentioned." Then, as if he had had enough of the subject, he changed it. "How was your mother when you left her?"

"She's as well as can be expected. But it's been dreadfully hard to deceive her about Mike! Aunt Addie—"

"Yes, Paddy, yes, yes, how is your Aunt Addie?"

She considered him thoughtfully.

"Martin, did you and Aunt Addie have a quarrel of any kind?" she asked.

"No, Lady Pat!" The negative was almost gruff.

"I've wondered what did happen," she ruminated. "Anyway, in spite of the doctor's orders, Aunt Addie argues we were wrong to make up the tale about Michael's going abroad. She says, 'After every lie comes a day of reckoning,' and I suppose it's true."

"A day of reckoning" repeated itself somewhere within him in a warning voice, sonorous and full of meaning. Then he realized that his day of reckoning would be with Adelina Pepperday. But he found no speakable words of affirmation or denial, so he remained silent.

"Last night Aunt Addie begged me over and over to tell her," continued Patricia. "All day mother did her best to act happy when her heart was breaking, and I couldn't make myself do it, she seemed so sad!" Patricia's gray eyes filled with tears. "Martin dear, it seems I'm lost in a black place and can't find my way out! I went up to Sing Sing to see Michael last Monday, and he thinks the same as Aunt Addie, but—but—how—how could I? You see, this was Yum-yum's first Thanksgiving without the Pater."

"Don't talk about it any more, Paddy," broke in Martin with bluntness. "It won't improve your health any to battle with these things all the time. I say, I've been over your letter—about fifty times, I guess."

He had switched into a new train of thought abruptly, purposely. Such nerve-racking subjects were impossible to drag to finality. He could give her no advice. He had no palliative against her grief.

Yes, indeed, there was one thing he could do—Benny! He suddenly leaned forward on his table, his cigar falling to the floor. Stooping to pick it up, he answered the "still, small voice" with tenacious stubbornness, "No, I'll not hand Ben over—not yet!

"I've been thinking a lot of you to-day, Pat," he said. "The fact is I've thought of little else. It would be easy

enough to get you the stock job you want, but I can't do it—not now, since I've seen you! You've got to rest. You can't work in the condition you're in with my consent—not while I have a dollar to my name. Why, child, you can scarcely hold up your head!"

Bravely she strove to restore the stolid calm that had perished in her rage against Patrick O'Kelleron and Edward Blake.

"But I want to work, Martin," she choked. "Oh, I so appreciate the friend you've been to us, but getting me a position now, away from New York where I won't be known as 'Patricia Pepperday,' and where I can earn some money is the greatest kindness you can do."

By main force he kept down the impulse to cry out that he was not her friend—that he was her enemy; he was a traitor, an iniquitous traitor.

"I hope you understand I don't want to bother you too much," she pleaded, "but, somehow, I thought of you as the one man who could and would help me."

"And so I will, my sweet, but not as you say you want it. There's more than one way to skin a cat. Now, listen to my plan! I know just what the doctor wants you to do, for I talked with him over the 'phone after I received your letter. He says that you must live in a different climate. That's as easy as rolling off a log, but it doesn't say you must work. Now, me—why—I—"

She interrupted him by struggling to her feet. With both hands clasped in his, she insisted, chin trembling:

"Nothing will help me but work! Nothing, Martin! I can't be idle! I mustn't think! I'll go crazy if I do!" She paused and then, "I could have gone to some of the agents, I suppose—"

"If you'd done that, Pat, I'd have been mortally offended," he interposed bitterly. "It's a sure thing, the job, I mean—if I can't make you change your mind."

"Well, I shan't change my mind," she maintained. "Get it for me if you really can. Mother's quite reconciled to my going away for awhile, and Aunt Addie'll take the best care of her. You've already given Barney a position, and I want one, too, please, Martin!"

Of a sudden he dropped her hands and, walking to the window, stared out unseeingly. He had come to a momentous decision. He would ask Patricia one question, the answer to which he had vainly attempted to extort from Benny when his conscience had clamored for justice.

Circling on his heel, he faced her with an inward tremor which did not appear on his mask-like countenance.

"I've been wondering, Paddy," he began with parched tongue, "whether every one's been talked to that happened to be at Cavendish's the night Brown was done for?"

He spoke unlike himself, much as if he were forcing the words to utterance against his will.

Why had he brought up that subject now? Patricia leaned forward and stared at him. She did know that behind his troubled eyes, his brain was begging for a negative reply. He wanted, oh, how he longed to hear her say, "No, not everybody. Benny was with me." Those few words would send him into the seventh heaven of relief. But she did not say them. It did not occur to her that that far-off midnight hour was of vital importance to him or any one else now.

He was putting her off about the stock job, was the thought that sent Benny's visit to Cavendish's completely out of her mind.

"You've asked a perfectly useless question because you don't want to talk any more about helping me," she asserted, her voice breaking. "Well, I can't blame you, Martin, and don't. Ever since you've known me, I've been a nuisance, I can see that."

For, perhaps, twenty seconds Brewer remained silent. Then Benny had not been with her Labor Day night! That established to a certainty with whom he had been. Fatty Funny Breeches! And he had imagined so often that Patricia would let light in on his problems. He had waited for that! He would have to start over from another angle, but where—how?

"You're more than wrong in your conclusion, my Paddy," he protested finally as he walked back to her. "You shall have anything you want. If it's stock, then stock it is. A year's experience, learning a couple of plays a week, will prepare you for Broadway in the legitimate. That's been my idea from the first for you Pepperdays."

At his words she went suddenly limp, and, cursing himself for his tactlessness, he hurried on, "The highest class company where I have any influence is in Butte City. I know Alf Carraby, the manager, and he's wired me twice to send him a lead from New York. Want to go to Montana?"

She snatched at the suggestion as if he were offering her the greatest boon on earth.

"Yes, yes, I do! And, I'll never be able to thank you—never—never,—Martin dear!"

"Have you picked out a name you'd like to play under?" he asked with effort. "Give it to me so I can put it in the telegram."

She considered a while.

"Yes! I've decided to appear simply as Patricia Rushmore. That was Yum-yum's name before she married the Pater."

His hand was on the door knob as she ceased speaking.

"Rushmore will answer as well as any," he said over his shoulder. "Wait a minute, honey, and I'll run out and wire Butte."

"Well, I've sent Carraby a day letter," he explained when he returned a few minutes later. "I told him I was going to ship him the prettiest lead I knew, and I'd be infernally obliged to him if he didn't work her to death. Now, that's all for the present. Say, Pat, come out for a bite."

Scraps of conversation, far wide of their problems, spanned the short distance to the Hotel Astor. Then, when they had taken a table, and he had argued her into ordering something other than tea and toast, he sat back and looked keenly into her face.

"You don't eat enough, child," he said.

"I can't eat when I'm so unhappy," she told him, "and, Martin, there's one other thing I want you to do. It won't be difficult, I'm sure."

"Spill it," he directed. "I told you what's mine is yours."

"I meant to put it in my letter," she went on, "but then I thought, if I saw you, I could make it plainer. Martin, you know Mr. O'Kelleron well enough to ask him an intimate question, don't you?"

At that moment her veil caught on the leaf of a large fern back of her, and if she had not been busy disentangling it, she would have noticed the dread that pinched his face. However, when she centered her gaze upon him interrogatively, he was nodding his head, no traces of his mental ague apparent.

"Sure, sure I do!" he replied. "Why?"

She made no effort to cloak her agitation as she said:

"I wish I could find out what he has against Mike. You were in the court room when—when he convicted him, weren't you?"

"Yes," he admitted in reluctance. Then he ejaculated, "Say, good God, what's the matter with you, Paddy?"

"Barney told me about how vile Mr. O'Kelleron was,"

she imparted swiftly, a line drawn sharply between her brows. "But it isn't possible for any man, no matter how wicked he is at heart, to prosecute a boy as he did Michael just for the love of it. Could you arrange for me to see him—to-day? I want to ask him myself what the King ever did to him that I don't know. He might tell me when he wouldn't you. I'll make him! I must see him, I simply must, Martin! I can never be happy again unless I do."

So that was the way the wind blew! was uppermost in Martin's dumfounded mind.

"The King didn't do a thing to O'Kelleron, not one single, blessed, damned thing, Paddy," he explained aloud. "You can see that for yourself, if you use your reason. Now, it's this way: Patrick only did what he thought was his duty.—Listen, dearie! Don't stare at me like that! I'm telling you the truth. A lawyer's a lawyer, and you couldn't turn O'Kelleron from a thing he thought was right any more than you could lift the Times Building.—Lord, you haven't set up a hate against him, child? Well, I swear, you have! Don't do it, sweet, don't do it! Hating another fellow only brings bad to yourself! I've known Patrick O'Kelleron for years, and he's deep down good, as good as gold."

As if she had received a mortal wound, she shrank back.

"But I must see him," she craved. "You must take me to him. If you don't, I'll go myself."

"I can't, Patricia," he returned with decision. "I couldn't if I wanted to. He's left New York to be gone for months. Now you want to know where he is, don't you? I can see that without half trying. Believe me, Paddy dear, when I say that I don't know. Oh, my girl! It's been heaping up things against O'Kelleron that's put that look into your eyes. You'll be right down sick if you don't quit worrying.—Listen, little girl, I beg

of you to forget about him, and let time ease you up some."

"Forget about him!" Forget Patrick O'Kelleron! When the hot, coursing blood froze to ice in her veins, ah, when she was beside the Pater, stark dead, cold and buried, then, perhaps, she would forget Patrick O'Kelleron, but never until then.

"I want to live always—just to hate him," she panted, almost swooning. "Martin, take me out of here. I don't want anything to eat! I can't breathe!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THEREAFTER forty-eight hours moved with funereal pace to that period of time when Patricia was ready to start on her long, lonely journey across the continent. At length she had been forced to believe Martin Brewer's report that Patrick O'Kelleron was not in New York. That she would be obliged to leave the city without delivering to him the results of the sinister workings of her mind had never been a part of her calculations. She had carried out her threat to Martin and had made several attempts to get in touch with O'Kelleron by telephone. Each time, however, she had received the answer, "Out of town!"

Thus she had lived through the measured minutes of those two never-to-be-forgotten days as one bereft of hope.

During the last midnight vigil, when sleep refused to close her scalded lids, she had turned aside from the path of faith and petition. Because she clung stubbornly to her racking animosity against Patrick O'Kelleron, the shrine of her devotion crumbled to dust.

The death knell of her girlhood sounded when she realized that the confines of her soul were too narrow to cherish a vengeful hate and the image of the smiling, red-haired stranger she had met in Blackberry Lane. Her heart, once a garden of love flowers, was now envenomed with a desire for the blood of the man who had disintegrated the Pepperdays, and, oh, how often she declared with vehemence that Patrick O'Kelleron's life was none too precious to pay his debt to the Pater.

Consequently, when the dawn filtered its gray over a

frozen world, her loftiness of purpose, her far-reaching ambitions for good were thrown to the worm that dieth not.

Four days after Thanksgiving she was ready to leave New York with no one at the station but Martin Brewer to wish her Godspeed.

"I'm always on tap for you, Paddy," he told her, profoundly stirred. "Wire me at every stop you make. And don't worry, honey! Smile it through, little pal!"

But their separation furnished no occasion for smiles to either one of them. She was on her way to a strange country, to live among strange people, broken in health and spirits; and he was returning to a gloomy mansion on Fifth Avenue, where neither money nor luxury could put cheer into his adored son.

Alf Carraby, Brewer's hearty, good-natured friend, met Patricia the evening she arrived in Butte City.

"I say, Miss Rushmore," he said later over the supper table at the Thornton Hotel, "you better take some time off till you get back your land legs. The work in my theater's hard, even for the best of them. We put on only Broadway successes, and they're mostly teasers."

"So Mr. Brewer told me," answered Patricia. "But I'm much stronger than I look. I'd like you to let me have my first part to-night, if you please. I understand the lead you have now—"

"Just like all the rest," broke in Carraby. "She wants to get married! A fellow gets hold of a good one—then, zip, she's gone!"

"You'll have no trouble with me that way," she hastened to assure him. "I have but one idea,—to reach the top of my profession!"

As she spoke, her face flooded with color.

"Gee, but you're some beauty when you blush, little girl," complimented Carraby, laughing. "Keep the rouge

pot at your elbow, Miss Rushmore, till the mountains color you up a bit. I bet your mind's eye was on your picture peerin' out of the bill boards and the like—then—eh?"

"I think it was," she admitted in far-away tones.

But she did not tell him that she expected Butte to place her feet upon the first rung of fame's ladder which impetus would carry her into Patrick O'Kelleron's orbit. Money, popularity, influence were what she needed to bring her plans to fruition. She drew a deep sigh when she thought how long she would have to wait.

"You'd best go up to roost now, girly," he suggested, beckoning the waiter forward. "You're clean tuckered out. I'll start you in to-morrow morning."

Then succeeded three weeks of ceaseless labor which heaped upon Patricia Rushmore laurels many and to be envied.

The rugged, western mountaineers accepted her as one of their own family in a trice, so to speak. Much of her appealing charm for her new admirers lay in her pensive, slate-colored eyes. Even her actor friends outdid each other in their endeavors to tempt a rare smile to the lips of their leading lady. And, strange as it may seem, not one of her co-workers felt a pang of jealousy when she was crowned with local tribute.

Impossible was it for any one to find fault with a sad child who seemed to live in a remote world of her own, and who passed over praise with small comment.

Thus the weeks passed until once more Christmas rolled out of the cycle of days to confront Patricia with hallowed memories. She writhed in the solitude of her room that morning, when she recalled the significance of this once dear and sacred time. Now, she no longer believed in its symbols. Now, she denied place in her storehouse of recollections for Yum-yum's teachings of the Manger

Babe; and the story of the Prince of Peace she ranked with fairy tales and fables. Christmas and its joys were dead and gone, hidden behind the walls of Sing Sing prison and buried in the vault at Cedar Hill Cemetery.

"You aren't listening to a word I say, Patricia," pouted Ruth Howland that evening from her position at the make-up table. "I've been talking a straight five minutes, and you're a million miles away."

The two girls occupied the same dressing room in the rear of the Carraby Stock theater and were making ready for the second Christmas performance.

Startled out of her reverie, Patricia glanced at her young understudy.

"Forgive me, please, Ruthie," she begged. "I was thinking of a lot of things. There! Now, I'm listening."

"I was saying I think he's a perfect beauty," Miss Howland repeated. "He was only three rows back this afternoon, and I'm sure he's the best-looking man in the world. The very idea of your not seeing him! If I had red hair like his, I'd never wear a hat." She leaned on a dimpled hand and, across an array of cosmetics, spoke to her own mirrored reflection, "He's been to three performances this week, angel face. What do you think, Pat? Does he come to see you or me?"

"You, of course, dear," Patricia decided without a moment's hesitation.

Again Miss Howland smiled knowingly at herself.

"I think, perhaps, he does," she beamed. "Lordy, I hope so! I do adore big men, and he—why, he can't sit in an ordinary seat. His legs stick out ten yards in the aisle.—I wish Alfy would find out who he is. I'm dying of curiosity."

A man shouted the half-hour in the corridor; then heavy steps paused outside the dressing-room door.

"Can I come in, Ruth?" called a voice through the keyhole.

"Surest thing you know, Alf," consented Miss Howland, and she turned to greet the manager as he bustled in. "Hello, old thing! Speak of angels! I was just pronouncing your royal name."

Alf Carraby chuckled contentedly as he looked first at one girl, then at the other. Of late, in excusable conceit, he had boasted that even the New York stage could not produce a match for Patricia Rushmore and Ruth Howland.

Playfully he tweaked Ruth's ear, laughed with her and sat down on a hat box.

"Noticed a big fellow out front, chicks?" he began.

"A mountain of bone and muscle —"

"With red hair on his noodle?" burst in Ruth. "Say, Alf, I should think I had. I was just talking to Patricia about him. But she lives so much inside of herself that she hasn't even given him a squint. Think of that! Mercy me, who is he?"

In mock seriousness, as if he were divulging an important secret, Carraby raised his hand to his mouth and spoke over the back of it mysteriously.

"Playwright!" he hissed, smiling. "Stephen Claypoole! When he isn't roisterin' about the city, he lives in that house of Nelson's, some three or four miles west of Galena Gulch. He'll make something of his writing, that fellow will, or I'll eat my shirt, collar and all. He's up in the air about meeting you, Patricia."

"There I go—smash!" exclaimed Miss Howland. "I might have known it wasn't poor little foggy old Ruth he came to see. Well, go to it, Pat, old dear. Far be it from me to dough up your cake."

"You needn't care, Ruthie," consoled Carraby. "I'm for you every time, and it's a Christmas supper for the

four of us in my rooms at the Thornton, if Patricia's willing. How about it, Pat? You don't go out enough to put a sparkle in your orbs."

"I'd like it, Alf," she answered, although her tone of disinterest belied her words. She was traveling the lines of least resistance. It was easier to accept the invitation than to explain why she wanted to refuse it.

"Then drop into my rooms after the show," directed Carraby, rising, "and we'll have a spread that'll swat the eye out of a gormandizer," and, like a whirlwind, he was gone.

In Miss Rushmore's suite at the Hotel Thornton, some hours later, Ruth Howland stood, poised like a swallow ready for flight, a rabbit's paw, well rouged, in one hand. She was critically examining Patricia with the eye of a make-up artist.

"Here, girly," she said, "let me *schmink* you up a bit. You're as pale as a sheet. You can't go down before your Lord Red-head, looking like a walking ghost. I'd like to be in your shoes to-night, Pat! Say, cutie, have you ever been in love—I mean the real thing, thrills and kisses—and—"

"No," interrupted Patricia swiftly, "no, Ruthie, of course not!"

"Then believe me, dovie, you're up against it now!"

Absorbed in the delicate task of dusting the rabbit's paw across Miss Rushmore's cheeks, she paused, and then, stepping back to inspect her work, she chattered on:

"Now, you're beautiful, honey! Wait till I redden your ears a trifle. There's nothing that'll catch 'em so quick as a blushing ear. Why, I can see straight through yours, you poor pigeon; it's so white! There! Now, you're a picture, a perfect picture! I'll dab myself a little, and then we'll rush up. Alf serves feasts fit for the gods."

With the aid of the mirror she deftly made crimson portions of her own countenance. With a final touch to her cheek bones, she whirled around.

"What's the matter with you, Pat?" she demanded. "You've had tears in your eyes all day in spite of a fine Christmas. No one in the Carraby theater ever received half the flowers you did to-day—or presents, either. What's the matter, darling?"

"I—I guess I'm a little lonely," conceded Patricia wistfully. "You see, I've always been home with my mother."

"Of course, you have," sympathized Ruth, "and it's horrid to be obliged to work holidays. But buck up, dear old thing. Cherries'll soon be ripe, and then you can take a run east and see your folks. By the way, look and see if my petticoat shows, will you?"

Gravely Patricia inspected the hem of Miss Howland's robe.

"No," she stated, striving to throw off her gloom, "but your skirt's so tight, Ruthie, I don't see how you're able to wear a petticoat underneath it to hang down."

Two minutes later they halted before Manager Carraby's apartment on the top floor of the hotel. Miss Howland's smart rap was responded to by the manager himself, who threw open the door and met them with extended hands and voluble greetings.

"Fine, little ones," he said, laughing. "You're just on the tick of time. Can't say that of every woman." Roguishly he winked one eye over his shoulder. "The scribbler's in yonder, toasting his shins over the steam. Come along."

Then, because he had a tender spot in his heart for Ruth Howland, he retained her hand as he walked beside her into the room beyond, Miss Rushmore following.

"Mr. Claypoole, Miss Howland!"

Patricia heard Carraby's introduction as her eyes fell on a flower-bedecked table. Christmas wreaths hung pendent from the chandelier and, centering each window, like round eyes, told their pretty tale of age-old lore. Strung, star-shaped, on crimson ribbons, holly glowed through the room, a hue of flame. The holly and mistletoe revived memories,—bitter, indeed. She drank the dregs of that cup of suffering when she saw the brilliant Christmas tree in the corner. Surely it was no wonder that she paid but slight attention to the low, even tones of a strange voice in response to Ruth's gurgles.

Then she became aware that her own name, "Miss Rushmore," had followed that of "Claypoole." She extended her hand mechanically, looked up and up and up, and then—mistletoe, holly and Christmas tree eddied into a circle of fire that swung her giddily into Blackberry Lane. She was staring into a smiling face, a face that seemed to leap out from the days of her youth, and brown eyes, touched with the gold of her dreams, were glowing upon her. Her giant of Blackberry Lane! Could this big man be he? The question raced through her mind in the temporary lull of sociabilities.

For one moment she set white teeth into her underlip to keep from crying out. Christmas memories, the red of the holly, the strung ribbons had quite turned her brain.

"I've met Miss Rushmore before, Alf," spoken in a ringing voice, awoke her to the realization that she had not gone mad after all.

In a trance she heard Ruth Howland laugh aloud and call her, "a tyke for putting one over on them."

Alf Carraby roared delightedly into her ear:

"Are you going to let Steve hold your mitt all night, Pat? Here, drop it, Claypoole, old man, and let's devour the turkey. Seeing you're both so well acquainted, you can spoon afterwards as much as you like."

Later, in the seclusion of her own room, Patricia could not recall what food had been set before her, or whether she had eaten a single bite. But how vividly she remembered every word Stephen Claypoole had uttered!

"He said he'd always believed he would see me again," she whispered into the silence as the clock struck four. "Somehow—somehow, I've known it, too. It was that wicked fiend who made me forget my—my Stephen."

Thus another black mark was added to the long score against Patrick O'Kelleron.

But now, in this precious morning hour, there was no space in her teeming imagination for any personality but that of her man, her big, big man! Her man of the golden eyes, the same smiling eyes that had traveled with her in fancy from Balmville into a world of triumph and tragedy!

She sighed and paused in her restless pacing of the room. She had found him at last, her man! Out of the depths of a mountain winter he had come to her, as once in a snow storm he had stood bareheaded in Blackberry Lane. Glorious the mountains that had hitherto cowed her into insignificance! Winter that had stung her with a wish for spring again rose joy-crowned over all other seasons!

Half-past four chimed in a single musical stroke of the clock's bell, and she walked directly to it.

"He's coming—to-morrow—no, to-day," she told the timepiece. "How many hours will you have to travel before then?" On her fingers she counted, "From half-past four to half-past five, one hour; from half-past five to half-past six, two hours"—and so on and on, up to high noon, did she murmur the minutes away. "Almost nine hours before I see him again."

Then she sighed and went to bed.

CHAPTER XIX

"It's perfectly darling of you to help me, Ruthie," fluttered Patricia in the fullness of her high spirits. "I'm so nervous I never could have combed my hair if you hadn't! Is it all right? Tell me honestly just how I look."

Ruth Howland was sitting on Patricia's bed, inspecting the small leading lady of the Carraby Stock, who was stationed in front of the mirror.

"If you use a speck of rouge this morning, Pat," Ruth replied promptly, "you'll look like a live broiled lobster. My dear, you've certainly perked up some since yesterday. Almost all the circles are gone from under your eyes. And, oh, weren't you great at rehearsal this morning! Alf said he'd never seen the part handled like that.—You pretty thing, I wish I had your picture this minute! —You feel a heap better, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," answered Patricia, "and my head doesn't ache a bit. But, Ruth dear, I wish you would go riding with us. I'm so nervous and jumpy I hate to go out alone with him. Do say, 'Yes!' this once, dear."

"Not me," giggled Ruth. "I've learned the folly of being *de trop*. Red-head would look a hole through me if I minced in, dressed up to go along with you. I know his selfish type. No, now, don't beg! For I say I won't! You can be as jumpy as you like as long as you don't jump over the moon and not be here when he arrives. Was there a word said last night about taking me with you two? Not a syllable! Oh, I know when I'm sot on! Not that I care a cent, though.

"You just listen to what your old maid friend is telling

you, Miss Pretty Gray Eyes! Stephen Claypoole'll pop the question before many days are over. Take my word for that! So you see you'll have to be alone with him to lead up to it. Now, my advice is, girlye, you catch him while he's flying by. To my notion you won't have another chance like this."

Ever since she had awakened, Patricia had been humming snatches of the hymns she had learned at Yum-yum's knee. Her happy excitement had, somehow, reanimated her faith in universal good.

"Mercy, Ruth, you're absurd," she remonstrated. "Just because a man takes a girl out driving is no sign he wants to marry her. You know that as well as I do."

But her heart thrilled as she spoke.

"Granted, my love, if the signs aren't there," laughed Ruth. "But Red-Head had as many of 'em last night as a fish has scales. He ogled you this way." She thrust forward her head and widened her lids until her bright eyes almost popped out of their sockets. Then suddenly she looked down and twisted her fingers. "That's how you did! He almost ate you up with his glances, and you simply couldn't stand it—not all the time. It's love, my dear! Pure unadulterated love—the real thing!"

"What a romancer you are, Ruth! Absolutely incorrigible!" sighed Patricia, but the sigh issued from smiling lips. "Do run in and take another peep at the sitting room, and see if it's quite straight."

Scrambling off the bed, Miss Howland drew her slender figure to its fullest height.

"Laws me," she complained good-naturedly, "you're a caution, you are, Pat. This'll be ten times I've looked over that blessed room in the last hour. What do you expect—the chairs to turn themselves upside down?"

"Oh, no, of course not, and I know it's all right, dear. I know it is. Forgive me, do! You've fixed everything

exquisitely. Now, I'll put on my hat and the flowers. Oh, aren't they gorgeous?"

"You've said something now," chortled Ruth. "There's nothing that tickles a fellow so much as seeing his love offerings on the lady of his choice.—Put one in your hair, too, but be sure it shows. Oh, you are pretty, Pat dear! Lordy, there's the telephone! Now, hear me! I'll let him in, and then I—vamoose! See?"

With a high-flung gesture of farewell, she disappeared into the sitting room, and Patricia wished she would hurry and take off the receiver. It did seem sometimes as though Ruth were a little slow.

"Send him up," Miss Howland's clear young voice sounded back to her.

Another spell of waiting! A distant rap—then voices, and Ruth came tripping in, her arms loaded with roses.

"Will you see what he toted up here?" she hissed softly, "and him! Well, he's what I call a beauty of a man. He's better looking this morning than he was last night, and that's going some! Now, I'll take one last look at you—There, turn around! Ah, you're glorious! I'll stick these posies in the bathtub—and by-by, honey—and good luck!"

In Patricia's sitting room, Stephen Claypoole was standing at the window, looking down into the street. Suspense had kept him awake and restless since he and Alf Carraby had separated in the lobby of the hotel at three that morning. He had found it impossible to rest until Butte had begun its short day's labor. Never in all the twenty-eight years of his life could he remember being overwhelmed with such anxiety. Elated by the memory of Patricia's cordial acceptance of his invitation to ride with him, he was fearful that she was entertaining him merely as a casual acquaintance. What would he do if he discovered that she was married or engaged to

some other man? He went cold at the thought. Perish the idea if he were ever to know contentment again.

Sibilant whispers trickled out of the adjoining room, a giggle or two, and then he whirled around. There she was in the doorway, the girl of his meditations, the girl who had glided past him over the snow twelve months before and had left her image in his heart. Now, in her simple, black gown, cut away at the neck, with a small hat rimming her dark curls, she looked on the point of darting off again.

The blood thumped like a riveting gun in his ears. He endeavored to sort out of his confused mind words that would please her. But there were a thousand unspoken questions in her gray eyes, and he was searching for an answer for all of them at once.

Then a slow, lovely smile of welcome widened her mouth, and he drew a long breath.

Where were the greetings he had prepared with so much care? He had forgotten them all. He was paralyzed with stage fright. He wished she would give him his cue.

But in a dead silence they took two steps toward each other. Neither remembered that the conventional, "How do you do! I'm pleased to see you," had not been spoken. Finally, after they had almost stared each other out of countenance, he blurted out:

"I've come to ask you to marry me immediately, Patricia!"

His voice, vibrant with passion, thrilled her with an unnamed sweetness. She had not expected this master of men to override every point of etiquette, to shatter all her girlish ideas of courtship. She knew she ought to say, "No, no, Mr. Claypoole, we are going for a ride. Do sit down a moment before we start!" But how could she, when she was hypnotized by the alluring shine in his brown eyes?

"You're going to marry me," he announced, as though he thought she had not heard him. "You belong to me! You know it very well! I—I belong to you! You—you knew last night that I'd ask you to marry me to-day. Patricia, little one, don't look so frightened! I—I love you!"

This declaration aroused her. They were strangers. He had not seen her enough to know her. She had seen him but twice. To cut off his impetuous speech, she flung out a hand, but he captured it and held it firmly, drawing her closer to him.

"Don't! Oh, don't!" she objected feverishly, trying to withdraw her fingers. "It's so quick—it's too sudden! Please, please!"

"It's nothing of the kind," he contradicted with fiery ardor. "It's neither quick—nor sudden. You know that as well as I do. I've loved—I've loved you one whole year. Is that sudden? I've longed for you, looked for you—hoping always—" he hesitated—"that I'd find you! Knowing that sometime I would! I went back to the place where I first saw you three times. I wandered about that country again and again. I've thought of you ever since. Is that too quick, I'd like to know. Tell me, is it?"

By this time he had possessed himself of both of her hands.

As though she were following in imagination his vain search at Balmville, she was considering him with a far-away expression on her face.

Embarrassed, she appreciated that she should utter words of rebuke, but she was too infinitely glad to hear his voice, and she believed him. He did love her! That blessed thought set her to trembling again.

"Don't be so disturbed, dear one," he begged, and then even more pleadingly:

"Oh, you do care for me a little, don't you? I mean—I mean—you'll try, won't you? And—and I'll make you so happy! No, don't take your hands away. Precious little hands—my little hands! Dear—oh—my dear!"

Reverently he bent from his great height and kissed her fingers.

"I adore you, darlingest darling," Patricia heard as she ceased struggling to be free. "Tell me you love me. You won't be sorry! I can't wait a minute longer!"

Love! Was this unutterable yearning that surged through her at the touch of his hot lips—love? The pain that had filled her heart for many weeks had gone to give place to a shy, palpitating response to his words.

"Sit down," she quivered, because she could not think of anything else to say. "Sit down, please, a little while before we leave."

Although she attempted to speak with calmness, her voice shook perceptibly. She urged him forward, but she might as well have tugged at the Rock of Gibraltar. He maintained his resolute position, holding her in her place, repeating fiercely, insistently, that he loved her. Did she love him a wee bit? If she did not now, did she think she could after a while?

"I can't take a step until I know," he went on swiftly, passionately. "I've lost interest in everything but you, Patricia. When I realized a few days ago that I'd found you, I could hardly contain myself. At first Carraby refused to introduce me to you. I think he knew I loved you. I want—I want you, dear. Patricia, I want you to marry me.

"I've forgotten all the nice things I meant to say. I had a ream of stuff all thought out. I didn't mean to put the cart before the horse, but it's done, and I won't take back a word. I couldn't sleep, not a wink, after I went

home. I laid awake, just mulling over to myself how much I loved you, dear, how very much I needed you. I can't think of anything or any one else.

"No, I shan't let you go, not yet, not until you answer me. I only want to know if you care for me at all. If you don't now, will you try? Don't keep me on the rack, child! A year ought to satisfy you! Surely it does!"

"It's been a long, sad year," she choked.

A look of sympathy sprang into his eyes.

"I'm sorry, very sorry," he exclaimed. "Forgive me! I forgot that I kept you up nearly all night. We'll both sit down. There, now let me go on. You'll forget all the sad days, dear, because—because—Oh, tell me, have you thought of me some—sometimes?"

"Yes!" Very softly she owned to it.

"And you wanted to see me again, Patricia?"

Gently he pronounced her name as though caressing it.

Had she wanted to see him again? How many, many times,—more times than there were hours in the sped year.

"Yes, yes," she assented almost inaudibly.

In sheer relief he sighed.

"And you'll pardon me for forgetting myself this morning," he entreated, "for being so abrupt? Truly I intended to wait at least one whole day before asking you to marry me. Are you sure, dear, you can forgive me?"

"I've nothing to forgive," she told him shyly.

"What a sweet child you are," he smiled. "But seeing you alone put every other idea out of my head. Now then, I'll—tell—you what I thought about after I left you this morning." He coughed bashfully. "You said—you liked what you read of my play. Now, didn't you? I wanted your opinion of it." He paused, a tremor passing over him. "You didn't say it was good just to compliment me—"

"It's wonderful," she broke in.

"You couldn't speak an untruth to any one! That I know. And how I wanted you to like my work! But, of course, nothing will be of any avail—if you can't—love me. Don't you need me just a little, sweet?"

"Yes!" his anxious gaze read in her silent lip language.

"God has been good to me, dear," he said in lingering praise. "So good, so good! Far better than I deserve. Oh, girl, my girl, can't you see we—we need each other? Heaven knows I want you, and—and—Tell me so again, sweet! Tell me that you want me—too!"

He was quivering with humble supplication.

"Yes," she vowed tremulously, "yes! I do, I do need you. I know I do. It seems as though I must be dreaming!"

Then the memory of her dependent mother, of Michael, obliterated the transplendent glory that had suddenly radiated over her unhappy life. She did not belong to herself. She could not give herself away, no matter how much she desired to.

"Yes, yes," she began in agitation. "I do love you, Stephen! I do! I know now I always have. But I must be honest with you—with myself. I can't think of what I want. I mustn't see you at all after to-day. It's absolutely necessary for me to work. You've forgotten what I told you about my little mother last night. I know you have. Oh, please don't talk about you and me any more. It isn't possible for me to marry while my people need me so. I must work."

She was horribly tempted to deny her own words, to retract them instantly. She could imagine no heaven so high, so lofty, as that of being Stephen Claypoole's wife. To resist the scorching desire, she pulled at her fingers to release them, but they were lost, completely lost, within his great hands.

"So you shall work, wee love, if you want to," he answered, "so you shall, sweetheart! Now, don't speak a word till I've finished what I'm going to say. I certainly haven't forgotten about your mother, and I love your loyal soul more because of what you're doing for her. I want her to be one of my mothers, too. I'll make her love me, I surely will. I'll be so good to you all, she'll have to like me in spite of everything. I can't even consider going back east and leaving you here. Now, that I've found you, I can't go—not for a day—unless I know you are mine, all mine. I couldn't work! I'd come straight back! Think of our being together, always, in a home of our very own, Patricia. You darling, if you look at me like that, I won't have strength enough to tell you the rest."

Hot tears rose to her lids, and she partly stifled a catching breath. She had just discovered what love meant. But now she had it for her very own, she was forced by circumstances to give it up. Never could she put herself before Yum-yum and the King.

"I know the thought that made you sigh like that," he said. "See, if I don't! You think I'm going to ask you to leave Carraby. Well, so I am, but not as you think, dear."

As the small hands within his grew rigidly tense, he paused. Then the agony in her eyes caused him to ejaculate swiftly:

"Why, my dear little girl, when you hear what my plans are, you'll be as excited as I am. Now, you run get your coat, and I'll finish my yarn on our ride."

As she disappeared, he called:

"Put on enough to keep you warm. It's a bitter day!"

CHAPTER XX

"BUTTE, MONTANA, *Thursday*.

"Dearest Barney:

"THIS letter will surely make you jump out of your skin. I'm twitching all over, writing it. You'll think the impossible has happened when you read it. Notice with your own eyes, boy dear, the inclosed bank draft for four thousand dollars. What do you think? First of all, dear, I've met the only man worth loving, and what's more, I'm going to marry him! His name is Stephen Claypoole, and, although he's a lawyer and has practiced a lot, he's writing a play. I've never read anything like it. He has asked me to star in it. Isn't that great? He said you could have any part you liked when I told him how fine you were. He gave me in advance on my future salary five thousand dollars, four of which I am sending you.

"He loves me, and I simply worship him, so what could be better than that we should work together? I've arranged with my manager here not to hold me to my entire contract. My understudy, Ruth Howland, will play the leads from now on.

"Stephen and I are going over to Idaho Falls to be married, to get away from my good stage friends. We're not telling any one yet about it but you. I'm happy for the first time since our trouble, dear. Be glad about the money and use it. It's ours! and Mike's, too! It'll start a new trial for him, and I want you to go right to work on it. Give in your notice, and go to New York as soon as you can. Stephen says I'm going to be so productive of money that I can have more any time I

want it. I was a little worried at first for fear he couldn't afford this, but he only laughed at me when I spoke of it.

"Don't tell any one, not even Martin Brewer when you see him, that I sent the money or about my getting married. He'll be surprised that I've left the stock, but I'll explain it to him when I come east. I want to tell Yum-yum and Aunt Addie myself and have the joy of seeing Michael when he's told he'll soon be free. If anyone asks you where the money came from, just say an admirer of Mike's is putting up to prove his innocence. Heaven knows that's true. There isn't a person in the world who admires that sweet boy as I do.

"I've been half sick ever since I've been here. My head has ached constantly. But I'm feeling a little better now, and I owe it all to Stephen. He says I must take a good rest after we're married, that I've worked too hard. Oh, Barney, if I'd looked the world over, I couldn't have found a man half as tender, as clever, or one who would love me as he does. When I see you, I'll tell you something perfectly wonderful. There, I'm at my old tricks again, arousing your curiosity and then not satisfying it. Well, I saw Stephen first near home. It's a long, beautiful story, but it will have to wait! He's stamping up and down, quite impatient for me to finish this. He just asked me if I were writing you a book.

"Darling boy, will you do something for me? Find out what Fancy Cavendish wants most; then give it to her.

"Be sure to write me all about the people I know.

"I've glanced over what I've written, and it reads like a hodge-podge.

"Address your letters to Patricia Rushmore, just the same as you have been doing. We won't be in Idaho long. In all probability we'll come directly east. I'll let you know. Stephen is anxious about his mother, and I'm wild to see Yum-yum.

"Be sure and give her everything she needs, and Aunt Addie, too. Give them both a million kisses for me.

"I send you all my love, dearest.

"Your devoted sister,

"PATRICIA.

"P. S. I haven't mentioned 'Pepperday' to any one and won't. Even Stephen knows me only as Patricia Rushmore. Well, that's my name now. I shall never use 'Pepperday' again. Stephen seems to know the right thing to do at the right time.

"Last night I told him I had something in my past which he must know. He laughed and said he had a past, too. I tried to tell him about the Pater and Michael, but I cried so he wouldn't hear me. He said that what had happened before I knew him didn't amount to a flip. It relieved me quite a little. He's so broad-minded and splendid! Of course, it'll come out soon, and he'll be heart and soul for us. He'll undo all Patrick O'Kelleron's wicked work against Michael, and our boy will be free. I say this because I know what kind of a man my Stephen is.

"My letters from Benny Brewer are quite dismal. Go see him, Barney, when you can. My regards to Martin, too. I've had some wonderful letters from him, and he's wired me flowers two or three times a week. I'm looking forward to your meeting my Stephen.

X X X X X X X X *Kisses!*

"PADDY.

"P. P. S. If you think it wise, dear, go back to Caven-dish's. That is, if you can stand it. You might discover something there.

"P."

CHAPTER XXI

IF the ugly, straight street in Idaho Falls had been a river of water, Patricia could have danced over it without wetting her feet, so exalted was she. She was not walking on the earth at all. Clouds of felicity enveloped her. Rejoicing voices hosannaed in her uplifted soul. She was married! She was married to Stephen Claypoole, royal Stephen, her kingly lover.

This Monday, this blessed Monday, was a holy span of hours in the center of the universe, consecrated, torch-like, above all yesterdays. To-day would be followed by unnumbered to-morrows, each in its turn flavored with the rapture of now!

She looked down at the hand nearest her heart. In the dimly lighted church but a few minutes before Stephen had slipped on the ring—precious, plighting circle of gold, emblem of never-ending life for them, and she had kissed it in adoration for the giver.

Joyfully she compared the parson's solemn avowal, "Then do I pronounce you man and wife until death do you part!" to the beginning of all good. How Stephen's red-brown eyes had burned with passionate tears and longing when in that sacred moment he had whispered into her listening ear:

"There'll be no death, no parting for you and me!"

Why, even if she were dead, she would still love Stephen, and he would love her!

Always and forever, on and on through the eternal ages, through God's infinite space, they would travel together as they walked side by side this winter evening in Idaho Falls.

Stephen had restored to her her faith in the Prince of Peace! His love had lifted her completely out of the Slough of Despond into which she had fallen that day in Roosevelt Hospital. Yum-yum's King of Glory had redeemed her through Stephen.

In worshipful silence she looked up at him. Even remembering all his assurances, all her own pious reflections, it was difficult to realize that such a big, big man belonged to such a little, little girl.

From his great height, he beamed down upon her.

"This is the first day I've lived, Patricia," he said in deep tones.

"My first day, too, Stephen," she concurred with throbbing pulses.

Then they fell again into quietude, each young heart busily summing up its own gladness.

Arrived at the hotel, they went immediately to the suite which Claypoole had reserved, in the living room of which was a table spread for two. There were flowers, many of them, and they lent to the dingy room a festive hue.

"There, little maid," boasted Stephen, "doesn't this look homelike? The dinner will be up in a jiffy. You see, I'm going to feed my wee bird this minute. Do you realize, little wife, that a cup of tea is all you've had since morning?" He rounded her blushing face with both hands and kissed her. "Ah, pretty love, it'll be my precious task from now on to make you gloriously happy. Now, take off your coat and hat and sit down. I'll wait on my princess—my queen! This is our—our wedding dinner—" He hesitated and kissed her again with mist-filled eyes. "My wedding dinner! My Patricia, my wife!"

She flamed with the desire to tell him that she had feasted and feasted sumptuously upon the choicest food

of heaven, but he would think her a silly little goose if she said that.

With a masterful manner he lead her to the table, and when he had seated himself opposite her, he drew a long, ecstatic sigh.

"Happy, *ma petite*?" he questioned, smiling at her.

"Oh, Stephen!" was all she could find voice to say; but the tone she said it in and the tremulous rise and fall of her rounded, girlish bosom, sent the blood pounding through his veins in feverish delight. He forgot that she had not dined, that she would need her hands presently. He gathered them closely into his as if he contemplated spending the rest of his life thus.

"I'd like to know what I've done for the world to have you for my very own!" he murmured, kissing her fingers between disjointed words. "I'll always remember how I felt when I first knew that I just had to marry you, or—or die!"

"Tell me about it," she said, her mouth wreathed in smiles.

For a spell he studied her gravely.

"It was that first minute I saw you in the theater, and I felt just as I do now," he burst forth fervently. "I knew you were the most beautiful woman in the world, and I wanted you! You're mine—down—down to this little finger nail, this wee one, aren't you, adorable? Tell me—tell me quick, or I'll come around there, and the waiter will catch me kissing you!"

"And you're mine, too," she triumphed, "clear—clear up to that last red curl. Put your head down here till I pull it!"

And thus, like two rejoicing children, did they chatter the precious nothings that are always a part of a maiden's wedding day.

"Stephen dear, when we're east in our very own place,"

she began rationally, after a while, "I'm going to be so helpful to you. I can scarcely wait to get—to get—home. I can see myself learning endless things that will be valuable to you, and every minute I'm going to be glad and—grateful."

He quizzed her with merry eyes.

"I suppose, when you said 'grateful,' you thought of that speck of money I let you have."

An expression of surprised reproach crossed her face, and she sat up very straight.

"Speck?" she demurred. "Speck, Stephen? Why, five thousand dollars is a fortune! What it meant to me is past describing, and I want you to know what I did with it."

To-day she intended to open up that dark cistern which until now had submerged her girlhood in its bitter waters. In the shelter of his arms she would tell him of the rise and fall of the "Golden Pepperdays." A wonderful thought came into her mind. He was a lawyer, and, of course, he was clever, too, even if he did not practice at present. After he had learned how her brother had been railroaded to Sing Sing, he would lay down his pen for a season. She could see without effort the prison gates open for Michael. With the eyes of her joy-brimmed soul she discerned the dear King in Yum-yum's arms. Her strong husband would bring all that about, for he not only loved her, but he loved justice.

"Don't spoil my bliss by sordid, financial considerations," he remarked playfully. "My dear, what in the world makes you so sober? What are you thinking about? — Ah, here comes the dinner."

For a few moments after the waiter had gone, he busied himself, arranging her plate.

"There," he said, passing it across the table, "see how you like that! But, as I was going to say, five thousand

dollars is a speck compared to what I have for you, my Patricia. Now, I'll tell you a secret, and it isn't half bad." He laughed a gay, boyish laugh. "But first let me see you empty that plate. Then I'll give you a history of my life a yard long."

In the pure joy of living and loving, she began to eat. The food was the better flavored because her husband had provided it. Before each mouthful she halted, caressing him with her eyes over the suspended fork.

It seemed then as if she had always known him, yet a few weeks ago he had been a stranger, save as now and then his image had ousted the fiend incarnate, to stay but a moment and depart once more. Then she had longed to meet him in the flesh, to hear the tones of his voice! To-day he was supremely hers, and she worshipped every red hair in his head.

"Now tell me if you like," she smiled, wiping her fingers on her napkin and sinking in her chair. "But I warn you I couldn't be any happier than I am this minute, no matter what your secret is."

"Well, perhaps, not really happier," he returned. "You'd love me just as much if I didn't have a copper. But I imagine you'll be pleased. At any rate wait and see. I say, darling, did you notice the marriage register — I mean how I signed it?"

At his question she shook her head in amazement.

"Nor that after putting my name on the certificate, I slipped it into my pocket instead of giving it to you, which I apologize for now? You know it's quite customary for every wife, especially wee ones, to take charge of the certificate herself. Didn't you know that?"

"No," she answered with wonderment. "No! I — I — Oh, Stephen, I was — so — gloriously happy, I didn't think of anything but — but that I was your wife!"

"You darling!" he interjected, glowing. "You can say the sweetest things. They tingle a fellow from his head to his heels. You quite turn my brains inside out. But there, I was about to tell you that, of course, when you promised to marry me, you didn't have the least idea that I had heaps of money, did you, small girl?"

"Heaps of money?" she repeated. "What do you mean by that, Stephen? It sounds so enormous, so — so big — Like a lot, I mean. Aren't you what you said you were, a — lawyer and — playwright?"

"I surely am," he rejoined. "At least I'm a full-fledged lawyer and have hopes of being considered a playwright with your help. Now, for a double confession! Why, honey, you needn't look at me as if I were a Bluebeard, ready to eat you up. Aren't you glad we've oodles of money we don't have to slave for?"

"I don't just understand," she said, her gray eyes raised questioningly.

Stephen chortled in merriment. He reveled in that adoring expression that shone out upon him.

"Of course, you don't!" he told her.

"May I have a little more coffee, maiden fair, please? Here! Here! Kiss that lump of sugar before you drop it in! One lump'll be enough if you always remember that," and she did kiss the sugar before blushing and handing him the coffee.

"I think we were talking about — let me see," he resumed, "I was just about to say that a girl like you thinks of money only when it is necessary to give it to someone else. But I won't tease you any more.

" 'Stephen Claypoole' isn't all my name. 'Claypoole' belonged somewhere on my mother's side and 'Stephen' was tucked in along with it at my baptism." He took a swallow of coffee and put the cup into the saucer. Then he settled back into his chair.

"When I came away from New York, I chopped the head and tail off my name, so I could be left alone a while by my newspaper friends. Queer, how a chap can drop out of his circle and remain incognito for weeks and months! "

It did not seem queer to Patricia at all. Perhaps, lawyers changed their names at will, like theatrical people. She had done the same thing; only she had not dropped "Pepperday" for a short period merely. She never intended to use it again.

"Names don't count," she stated without the least curiosity in her tones.

"You're a wonder, midget," Claypoole chuckled. "Haven't you the slightest interest to know your full new name? "

Her reply was not immediately forthcoming. She was beseeching a divine invocation upon him in a rapturous, blind worship which possessed her wholly. Finally, as if her ears had just caught his question, she answered:

"My husband is Stephen, my Stephen. He still would be my Stephen by any other name."

"How exquisite you are, littlest dear," he cried humbly. "And who am I that you should love me? What I am, what I have, is yours — yours! Patricia, my wife, when we get back to New York, you'll have a position as good as the best."

"I suppose you mean on the stage," she quivered. "Of course, I will, in your wonderful play, and — and I'll work harder than I ever have! I'll make you proud of me, Stephen! "

"But I wasn't thinking of the stage when I said that, love girl," he explained. "I mean a social position. You'll have that as soon as you set foot in New York. And you shan't have a care in the world — not one that I'm able to save you from. And you'll love my mother,

too, and she'll take to you the first minute she sees you. She's always wanted a daughter. As my wife you can do anything you like, have anything you want, dearest!

"Won't New York gasp with excitement when I take you back and say, 'Here's my wife! What do you think of her? Isn't she a beauty? Isn't she a flower? Tell me now, what you think of Mrs. Patrick O'Kelleron!'"

"Patrick O'Kelleron!" The hated name struck Patricia like a blow in the face.

His words trailed into a jumble of inarticulate sounds, then silence. For a moment she kept her eyes upon him, scarcely breathing. She could see his lips move as if he were telling her something; but the buzzing in her ears was too uproarious for the meaning of what he said to pass into her consciousness. "Patrick O'Kelleron" roared in her brain, expelling every other thought.

Then Barney's dejected voice spoke as if he were bodily present, "O'Kelleron killed the Pater, Paddy!" Each word pressed her farther down into the dark, deep abyss of hate. Patrick O'Kelleron had destroyed the Pater; under the thunder of his eloquence, her father had dropped down dead.

She had married the Pater's murderer! No! God, no! It was not true! Every drop of blood drained from her face, leaving it so pale that her sand-gray, horrified eyes were like burning, black pools. She shrank back into her chair, her reason balancing on the very verge of insanity. Her head pained as it had in the nightmare days in Roosevelt Hospital.

Now and then she caught an exclamation from Stephen, intermixed with endearments. The voice she loved was speaking, but she did not understand one syllable it uttered. He was leaning over the table; he was holding out both hands to her. Frozen cold, she drew farther back, her fingers stiffly clutching each other.

That man was not her husband, Stephen Claypoole! He was Patrick O'Kelleron! No, he was not! O'Kelleron's eyes were black. Barney had said so! Her gaze was riveted unblinkingly upon him. Then as she looked, the red of his hair faded slowly to silver, the blood poured out of his ruddy skin, leaving it death-white, and the Pater's eyes, eyes slate-gray instead of red-brown, were staring at her. For one awful second she still looked, then her head sank forward, and she shuddered.

"My God, what's the matter, Patricia?" The agitated tones broke through the horror that encompassed her around and about.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" she managed to say feebly.

"I've told you, dear," he ejaculated in contrition. "I wanted to surprise you! But, Heavens, child, if I'd known you'd have taken it like this, I wouldn't — No, dear, I didn't deceive you really. Stephen Claypoole *is* my name."

"It's not the name; it's — you — you!" stammered from her blue lips.

"But you said, dear, I'd be your Stephen always, didn't you?" he argued in earnest, troubled appeal.

Yes, she had said that very thing, but — Stephen was not Stephen. She was not able to answer him, nor dared she look up.

"Surely, little love, you won't hold that small deception against me," he went on swiftly. "Why, I thought it was a good joke all the time!"

"Joke! Joke!" The Pater — her dear, dead father! Her small hands came together against her breast in a tragic gesture.

"Oh, how awful, how awful!" she moaned.

Before her words were finished, Stephen was on his feet.

"What a fool I was!" he exclaimed, striding around the table. "Dear, sensitive, honest little heart! I thought you'd laugh with me and—and—"

Shaking like an aspen leaf, she struggled up. In her mental turmoil she was striving to think of a place where she could go instantly. Stephen laid his hands lovingly on her shoulders.

"I thought you'd be quite happy about it, Patricia," he insisted desperately. "Look at me, sweet! — Kiss me, darling!"

She stood a moment, rocking under his hands. She wanted to look at — Stephen. She wanted to kiss him, to awaken from the nightmare of hate for Patrick O'Kelleron.

"Look at me, Patricia," he begged once more.

She flashed her eyes to his face. He *was* Stephen, her Stephen! He was smiling at her pleadingly. He had not murdered the Pater!

Then, as though the hand of Heaven had caught his life away, Stephen's dear brown eyes and tumbled red hair changed slowly. She quivered from under the fingers on her shoulders. She tried to step backward. To keep her reason, she had to escape somewhere — anywhere. Then with a final long gasp, unconsciousness blotted out the composite picture of age and virile youth. Stephen's great height, Stephen's broad shoulders, with her father's hoary head set upon them, vanished into darkness.

CHAPTER XXII

IN the hotel room, alone, Patricia lay on an old-fashioned sofa, a damp cloth across her brow. The table with the dinner remains upon it still stood under the gas chandelier. Ten minutes before she had heard her husband tiptoe into the hall and shut the door behind him softly. Of course, he had thought her asleep all the time he was beside her, motionless. How could he know that she had been floundering about in a mental sea of agony for an hour, her body inertly weak? Sixty minutes! Sixty long centuries since Stephen Claypoole had whirligigged into Patrick O'Kelleron!

Instantaneously, with the first glimmer of consciousness, she had recollected what had made her faint away. She remembered in excruciating torment how her husband's glowing, clear-cut countenance had suddenly been submerged by the drab gray of the dead. But she remembered, too, that Stephen's voice had brought her back from the edge of the same deep chasm that had nearly swallowed her up in New York; even now, she felt very close to it. She needed him this instant to keep her from slipping into nowhere. With that thought she was confronted by the realization that Stephen was not her Stephen any more. He was Patrick O'Kelleron. And such hate as hers for him could never die — never! She had nursed it too long for it to be any other than a sturdy plant, rooted deep in the very fiber of her being.

Turning her aching head, she glanced at her watch, diamond studded, on her wrist. Stephen had given it to her the same day he had put the large draft into her hand. How exquisitely tender he had been then.

That five thousand dollars! Shuddering, she pulled the blanket up about her shoulders. In some way she would have to recall the sum she had sent to Barney. A part of the one thousand she had already used for jim-cracks.

She sat up but sank back slowly. Instead of the floor, a yawning hole was there to receive her! Where was Stephen?

She wanted him — now. The memory of his low voice soothed her a little. He was not the Pater's murderer! He was not Patrick O'Kelleron, any more than she was some wicked witch who went about slaying little children. Yet he had pronounced that dreadful name, claiming it as his own! Ah, it was false! She had heard it in her sleep! She had been dreaming, — and dreams were not true at all.

The pillow was wet with her tears. She could not live without Stephen. He was her husband. Where were those heaven-born beliefs that had stirred her so sublimely on leaving the church? Where was Yum-Yum's King of Glory?

Once more she sat up, looking quite wild. Patrick O'Kelleron had slaughtered her Prince of Peace! Stephen's bread of life had turned to ashes in her mouth!

"God, God dear," she cried, writhing, "let me keep my Stephen! Pater, blessed Pater, take — take Patrick O'Kelleron — away — quick! . . . I'm mad! Crazy mad!"

Something like an icy breath brushed along her out-flung hand, and she thrust it under the covering.

Was Stephen never coming back to her? Yes! Yes! He had said that through all eternity, they would be together!

During the ensuing minutes, she followed no consequential reasoning. It seemed that body and soul to-

gether were caught in a bog, not deep enough to smother her, yet from which she could not escape.

A step in the hall, a springing, rapid step, stirred her to move, and, when Stephen opened the door and entered, her face was turned toward the wall.

"Did my girlie think I was never coming back?" he asked gently, stealing to her side. "I thought you were asleep. I hoped you were, and I ran downstairs to do a little writing. Is your head better, dearest?"

"Yes," she answered, her fingers on her closed lids.

"I brought you some fruit," he ventured. "I'll just put it in this dish."

But he sighed as he said it, for she made no answer, nor did the small hand uncover the sand-gray eyes from which he passionately desired a smile of forgiveness.

"All the time you were asleep, dear, I cursed myself for deceiving you," he said, returning to bend over her. "I didn't realize how despicable it was. But you'll forgive your big boy and tell him you don't mind a bit that he happens to be Patrick O'Kelleron. — Look at me, darling!"

The rich, low voice, that had reverberated through her music-loving soul since first she had heard it, was Stephen's! She loved it!

"Look at me, Patricia," the voice commanded.

Under its compelling force, she slowly twisted around. Eyes like her own, that had long ago closed their lids to the world's unkindness, were staring at her. Fangs of ice gnawed at her heart. Her lids fluttered and dropped. She was horribly afraid of the haunting thing that had identified itself with her husband.

"I wish I were dead," she gasped. "I don't want to live any longer!"

His face grave with anxiety, he laid his cool fingers on her throbbing temples.

"Don't say that, dear," he pleaded. "It's the excitement that makes you feel so. Let me rub your head a little."

As his fingers traveled over her brow, she fixed him with one searching glance. The Pater's strained, blue lips were speaking words she did not understand. The Pater and Patrick O'Kelleron were mingled together to kill her. Was that it? No! Her beautiful father, spirit though he were, would not hurt one hair of her head. Of that she was sure! Then — then he had come back to the earth to stand between her and the fiend incarnate whom she had married. There came no condemning thought for herself. She did not realize that the hate she had hugged against Patrick O'Kelleron for months had become sentiently alive within her soul and had taken ghastly shape before her physical sight.

As if to escape the cold touch of death itself, she shrank aside and frantically pushed his hand away.

"No, don't do that," she screamed. "Don't touch me, don't! I don't want you to come near me!"

A deep flush crept up from Stephen's collar and spread away in waves until he was wax-white.

"Patricia," he protested, standing erect, "please do let me do something for you, dear. Can't I make you understand how very, very sorry I am?"

The hour had come for an explanation, or the minute, rather. It was being forced upon her by a ghostly presence. Then where could she go in the world where Stephen's voice would not reach her and call her back? Where to hide from Patrick O'Kelleron? She tried to make out the lineaments of Stephen's face; but red-brown eyes were sand-gray, and red hair was bleached to an appalling white.

She crawled off the sofa and stood up, wavering. Her husband caught her arm and helped her to a chair.

How one silly action could have so blighted his precious wife was beyond his comprehension. He wanted to take her in his arms, to kiss away the tears, to make her forget that he had not been honorable.

"Patricia," he said yearningly.

As ever, his enunciation of her name amounted to a caress. Involuntarily she looked at him but encountered the same frightful illusion.

"I — I can't live — with — you — ever, Stephen," she stammered.

He uttered a partially muted ejaculation. Of course, she was speaking words she did not mean at all. She was nervous, ill; perhaps, a relapse of the attack she had had in New York about which she had told him. She had gone to work too soon. With eager desire to quiet her, to remove from her mind the harassing torment that had made her face so haggard, he said:

"Do lie down again, dear. You're shivering. Patricia, you're hurting me so when you look at me like that! I'm your husband — your Stephen! Don't you know me? Why — why — you can't leave me! I couldn't — I couldn't live an hour without you. Do lie down and rest, sweet."

What seemed the brackish tears of months gathered in her throat; drooping, blue-veined lids lowered to blot out the sight of the death mask. She could not lie down and told him so.

"Poor darling," he murmured. "Then let me put this blanket around you. Can't you tell your boy what makes you feel so badly?"

"Because — because I'm going to leave you." The words fluttered out on a breath.

One of her slender hands made impossible his effort to look into her face. Then he knelt down beside her.

"No," he interjected, "don't say — that! Don't,

Patricia! You love me, you do! You've told me so over and over."

"But I'm going away from you — to-day — now," she insisted.

Profoundly alarmed, he arose to his feet. The unspeakable fear she had inspired in him was burning him up.

"But love always forgives, dear," he urged humbly, "and we love each other too well to let anything separate us. What more can I say to express how sorry I am for — for deceiving you, or what can I do? You have but to tell me, and I'll do it immediately.

"Why, Patricia dearest, you're nervous and afraid. I can see that, honey! You think that, because I kept one thing from you, you can't trust me; but you can, you can! Listen, dear! I'm your own, own husband, and you belong all to me — to me, Stephen."

He leaned over and placed his hand under her chin. With his fingers cupping her cheeks, she stared into his eyes, stared at the face of a dead man that was haunting her to insanity.

"Now, smile at me, dear," he begged encouragingly. "I'm perishing for just one kiss, Patricia."

"Go away, for — for God's love," she ejaculated, cringing from him.

"I'm almost beginning to believe, to think you mean what you say," he said in limp fashion. "But it isn't true. It isn't! It can't be! There's a frightful mistake somewhere. Let's find it right now, littlest dear."

Because her heart was hammering against her side, one shaking hand went up to it.

"Won't you go away for a little while—please, please, Stephen" she petitioned piteously. "Yes, it all has been a mistake, a—fearful mistake! My—my marrying you!"

His face went more ashen white! If there had been a mistake, then it was a disastrous time to discover it, not two hours after the marriage ceremony.

"What do you mean by a mistake, Patricia?" he demanded.

What he had done to Michael seemed no part of the accusation she had to make against him. He was a murderer! Her duty lay in telling him so!

"Stephen," she gulped, looking up at him, "I—I—"

Her voice broke, and she sobbed convulsively. The grisly gray head on her husband's shoulders had moved slowly in negation. The Pater had commanded her to silence.

"I can't return the money you let me have, Stephen," she burst out, "for I haven't it now. But I'll go to New York and work, and—and you shall have the whole amount as soon as I can earn it. Oh, I want to go home to my mother! I won't bother you! I'll never try to see you!"

Stephen's head seemed to spin around like a top; his ears hummed as though a million bees were buzzing within them. Could she mean to leave him forever? That he could not and would not bear!

"If I take you to Butte, will you stay there with me a while?" he asked mechanically. "Will you give me one more chance, Patricia?"

"Oh, I don't know what I'll do," she groaned. "I don't know—I don't know!" She put her hands to her aching head. "No, I can't promise to live with you in Butte—or any—where else. Stephen, will you let—let me—have these rooms—alone—now—until we go away from here?"

"No," shot from his lips. "No, Patricia, I will not! You're my wife, and you married me of your own free will. You think I don't love you, but I do, my Patricia!"

Suddenly, unexpectedly he snatched her from the chair

into his arms. He pressed her face against his breast fiercely. He knew he was hurting her, nor was he sorry. He was simply crazed with a longing which nothing could assuage but subduing the girl who had married him and then had thrust aside his adoration as a useless, unvalued thing.

"I love you, my girl!" beat upon her ears over and over. "You're mine, sweet," seemed to tear at her heart as if small knives were hacking at it. "Never, so long as I live, will I let you go!"

Then his lips burned against hers, roved in passionate strength over her cheeks and against her mouth. Carried with him into the depths of a great passion, she rushed along on its tide, blind and deaf to all but his kisses and endearments. When he ceased, she hung in his arms, half-fainting.

Then all of sudden the sad-eyed phantom with its pasty, lackluster face took shape again in the line of her vision. Then it *was* true! The Pater had left the high heavens, had come down to earth to condemn her union with Patrick O'Kelleron! She was not crazy at all. The simple fact had been proved to her that spirits were permitted by God to make known their desires to their earth-bound loved ones. The Pater had done that! He would not allow her to lie one second on the heart of the man who had crushed the Pepperdays.

She wrenched herself free, fled past the distracted man and vanished into the sleeping room, leaving behind but the faintly perceptible scent of violets.

On tossing the tumblers in the lock of the door that separated her from her husband, Patricia staggered across the room to the dressing table and flung herself into a chair.

"Stephen, Pater, Patrick O'Kelleron!" fell from her lips. "God, isn't it awful!"

She sent a quick glance over her shoulder, half-expecting to see the ghost of her father drift through the panels of the door.

When, in relief, she turned back, her eyes encountered her own face in the mirror. The reflection thrown upon her from that circle of bevel-edged crystal, was dead white. She held her breath and listened. No sound came from the man she had just left. She dropped her chin into her hand, clenching her fingers around it. She set small teeth together, grating them, saw-like.

And hours later found her still sitting, head down on her folded arms,—and deep silence in the room beyond.

CHAPTER XXIII

TEN hours slowed by, eternal hours to Stephen Claypoole. His wedding night had been spent in a state of dazed wakefulness. Hurt pride had kept him from forcing himself into his wife's presence. She had locked the door; that was enough!

Early morning found him prowling restlessly around deserted streets, waiting for the barber to take down his shutters.

Later, when he entered their suite, Patricia was sitting near the window, her hands clasped together in her lap. The night had given her a small relief that her husband, in his ignorance, had not received. Her father might have been present in the flesh from the way in which she had talked in whisperings to him. In her superstitious fear she had promised the dear ghost over and over that she would acquiesce in his guidance whatever it might be, until towards morning she had fallen into a fitful sleep.

She was relieved to find Stephen absent when she crept into the sitting room. The next hour, perhaps, would separate them forever. She must accustom herself to the thought so that she would not break down at the last minute.

Before closing the door, Stephen halted a moment. One quick glance at his wife told him that she was undoubtedly ill, and that, like himself, she had slept but little. Yet, that she was in the same frame of mind as when she had raced away the night before, was borne in upon him significantly. She had given him no greeting; nor had she deigned him a look.

"I'll order coffee, Patricia," he said, walking to the

telephone, "and toast, too. You'll drink some coffee, won't you?"

"Yes, Stephen, please," she murmured.

Silence reigned until the waiter appeared with the tray and had gone out again. Each managed to swallow a cup of hot coffee, but the food remained, untasted. Bitter bewilderment kept the young husband from making impetuous demands, and Patricia was studying how to frame requests that would hurt him least.

Suddenly she stammered:

"Stephen, if—if I promise to return that money, may I go to New York to-morrow?"

"You may not," he retorted. "Your place is with me." He made the statement swiftly, smothering a desire to blurt out the thoughts that had tortured him during the night.

"But you won't be happy if you keep me with you," she said in anguish. "Can I say more than that I'm sorry, oh, so sorry for—for—"

"Yes, you might say a great deal more, if you would, Patricia," he interrupted. "You might be truthful with me! Just what do you wish me to believe?"

"I don't know what I want you to believe," she replied wearily. "Only this, Stephen: I can't—I can't live with you."

They were the same words she had spoken the day previous and, because she had had time to reflect, they cut him deeper.

"Didn't you intend to live with me when you married me?" he choked.

She was hurting him horribly, she knew that. Her own nerves were like thistles pricking inward. As yet she could not truly look upon the Stephen she had loved and married as the Patrick O'Kelleron she had only heard about. There seemed to be three entities in the one big

frame of her husband,—her own man whose voice was sweeter to her ears than any other sound, the Pater, his incorporeal eyes demanding her supreme sacrifice, and—Patrick O'Kelleron.

"Didn't you, Patricia?" he asked once more, greatly agitated.

She had to strangle a desire to leap into his arms, to implore him to help her, but fear of the Pater's disapprobation held her back.

"I—I didn't know what I was doing," she faltered, "and I suddenly realized I couldn't live with you. Oh, won't you let me go, Stephen?"

Stephen Claypoole guided his horses out of Butte in a stupefaction that had come upon him in Idaho Falls.

His wife's trance-like state, which had settled her into a silence that he could break but momentarily, gave him grave concern.

And it was not until they had left the snow-draped city behind them that Patricia aroused herself.

"Where are we going, Stephen?" she appealed, scarcely above a whisper. "We're driving directly away from the town, aren't we?"

By this time the horses were plodding up grade and needed but little attention. Inwardly congratulating himself that she was already beginning to manifest an interest in external things, he half-turned about in her direction.

"We've just left Galena Gulch, dear," he replied.

"Stephen, Stephen dear," she cried in a panic, "you're not taking me to the 'Eagle's Nest!' Are you? Couldn't we stay in Butte a while, or go somewhere else? I—can't—go up—there—with you!"

The look he bent upon her was full of tender patience, indulgent of her whims.

"Don't say that till you've tried it, sweet," he admonished. "I'm hoping you'll love it as I do, and I'm sure it'll do you a lot of good."

Queer little sensations ran the length of her spine, and it was not the winter gales that caused them. His words were kind and spoken in the voice that invariably tended to tranquilize her, but there was an undercurrent of inflexibility about his whole attitude that betokened his determination to be master. She was growing mortally afraid of her big husband. She attempted to calm herself. She remembered how gallant he had always been. Then a wave of faintness swept over her as she recalled that Stephen was not Stephen any more. He was Patrick O'Kelleron, and—and he delighted in killing people. The finality in his tones sent her into a hopeless silence.

On and on, among the swirling sheets of drifting snow, they traveled, farther and farther into the vast spaces of the hills, until Patricia began to realize what he had meant when he had said, "The 'Eagle's Nest' is far away from the rest of the world."

About the time the audience was leaving Alf Carraby's theater in Butte at the close of the afternoon performance, Stephen drove into a wide clearing and pulled his horses to a stop.

"Here we are at last, Patricia," he said, turning to her.

Through her tears, which she could not swallow away, she saw a house, its back door set close to a belt of mountain trees. The front of it was cheerful, a shining light displayed in each window. Smudges of smoke poured from the chimney and were carried into the snow by the wind.

She had visualized every change that might come for her save this—the "Eagle's Nest!" Did Stephen intend to keep her here? No, he would not do that! It would

be the extreme of cruelty! Yet, as she stole one look at the brawny shoulders of the man, she decided he could be as cruel to her as he had been to the rest of the Peppers.

"I can't go in," she gulped between low-caught sobs.

"Bless us, midget," he expostulated tolerantly, as to a fractious child, "surely you can!" He kicked away the fur robe and jumped to the ground. "Now, then, I'll help you out!"

She closed her eyes when she felt herself lifted by two powerful arms. A short whirl through space, and the next thing she knew she was standing dizzily on the porch, her hand held tightly within her husband's warm clasp. For an instant they clung together. To lean upon his decisive strength was a relief to her distracted mind, and sensing her involuntary yielding, he vowed happily to himself that if loving kindness could restore his wounded "birdie," he would give it to her in measureless quantities.

"We're home, Patricia," he breathed into her ear.

"The horses, Ming," he gave order to a Mongolian who had appeared in the doorway, "and—then supper as soon as you can get it ready."

Then he guided Patricia into a spacious living room where blazed a huge log fire.

It was furnished with an eye to elegance. Luxurious chairs clustered about the grate. A long, refectory table, used evidently for dining, stood between two of the three windows. In a corner—and she stared at it as if suddenly a friend had loomed up before her—was a small baby grand piano. She felt a frantic desire to fly to it, somehow, to seek refuge. Making no move to take off her wraps, she left Stephen's side and walked over to it. It was on the type of her own piano at home, and loneliness swept her like a tempest. A sheet of song music was

spread open as though some one had just ceased singing. Then she leaned against the piano and wept stormily.

"Let me help you off with your furs, Patricia," exclaimed Stephen, himself moved almost to tears.

She looked so tiny as she stood there in that drooping attitude that he crossed the room, eager to soothe her.

"Don't feel so badly, dear," he entreated.

She shivered away to escape the hand she felt on her arm.

"My darling, won't you listen to me?" he breathed.

"Surely—surely you know how I love you."

Instantly she was erect. She crushed back the hysteria that swelled her throat full. Then with trembling fingers she wiped her eyes. She knew he was waiting for an answer. That he was suffering was evident in his loud breathing. With a superhuman effort she made herself say:

"The piano made me homesick. I'm sorry! I'll be perfectly all right in a minute."

Under the circumstances it was a plucky fight she fought for calmness. For one fleeting second her eyes roved over the shining top of the piano, then centered on the sheet of music. Familiar words came out of the whiteness of it, and she read:

"There is a River, the Streams whereof shall make Glad the City of God. Rearranged by Martin Brewer. Dedicated to the 'Golden Pepperdays.'"

A blast of wind shook the house and shrieked through the mountain trees. Then it quieted into moaning sounds, like the groans of souls in torment.

She was still staring at the song she had sung to Michael,—to David, the shepherd boy. A low, hoarse cough reached her ears. Stephen was near her. Stephen was coughing! He was waiting for her to speak.

"Stephen," she gasped, putting her hands over her face,

"Stephen, take me away from this awful place! Please tell me you will—to-night—now!"

Every word was a wail, uttered in pain.

In spite of his good resolves, renewed but a minute or two before, his response was harsher than he intended or realized:

"Don't be foolish, child!"

Then he lapsed into the watchful silence that had become his habitual attitude since leaving Idaho Falls.

He was so quiet that she flung around on him, but it was not Stephen, her smiling Stephen, who stood there. His giant figure, erect, vital, its grouped muscles plainly revealed through his clothes, carried a dead man's head! She dropped her lids in unsupportable wretchedness. Her father's spirit had followed her from Idaho Falls to Butte, through Galena Gulch and over the hills to the "Eagle's Nest." She opened her lips to tell Patrick O'Kelleron that he and the dead Pater would kill her between them, but no sound came. Some gripping power kept locked within her the words she felt she must speak. Yet apart from her father and O'Kelleron, there was Stephen. He was one of the trinity of men that controlled her. She must always remember that.

The thought pressed upon her that, if she were miserable, he was as much so, and enormous sympathy for them both rose and stifled her. Above all things she wanted Stephen to be happy. She wanted to be happy herself, too! But she never would be—never! She stepped aside to avoid him and walked to the grate.

When he followed her and removed her long fur coat and hat, she made no resistance. She seemed to the troubled husband to be again enveloped in a trance. How little-girl-like she was with the locks of glistening hair, curling damply about her neck! She was his! His wife, so delicately small!

To bring her back to normal womanhood through tenderness, through love, was his task from now on.

An hour later he piloted her over the house and insisted that she take any room or rooms for which she might have a fancy.

"There aren't so many to pick from, Patricia," he explained, "but take your choice. I suggest the snugger, the suite with the sun porch."

"No, those rooms belong to you," she told him.

She had noticed his papers scattered about on the walls and tables. There came into her mind the sickening thought that where she slept, what she had to eat, made not the slightest difference so long as Stephen insisted he was Patrick O'Kelleron.

She chose a good-sized chamber that adjoined the living room, and, as she listlessly arranged her toilet articles on the dressing table, she dully denied she would be there long enough to go to all that fuss and bother.

Immediately after dinner, which was a dismal meal, indeed, Stephen left her sitting by the grate, and she saw him no more that evening. Sometimes she found herself listening intently for the unlatching of his door and wondering if he were going to retire without bidding her "Good-night." She did not realize how difficult it was for a man of strong natural tendencies to contemplate her loveliness and hold in check an overweening passion.

Several times a great desire came to her to touch the piano. Once she tiptoed to the instrument, but "There is a River" sent her cowering back to her place near the fire.

Occasionally she heard her husband stir about behind his closed door, and the frequent sputter of matches evidenced how often he lighted a cigarette. It would be untruthful to say that she was not tempted, more than once,

to creep into his den just to be near him. She knew she would not dare to look at him. Yet, she felt persuaded that his voice would dissolve the pain in her head.

She could find no future for herself in the perilous path her mind traveled. In a short time Stephen would hate her, and the dawning of that day would find her in her grave. The vast silence, broken only by the souging of the wind through the mountain passes, bore down upon her in appalling isolation. If one evening were so long, how could she bear a succession of them!

CHAPTER XXIV

THE small hand of the clock set in a traveling case on the table pointed to the hour of nine as Patricia opened her eyes. She had been dimly conscious of the strange, gray chamber with its shadowy corners since the dawn had peered in at the window. Between spells of dozing she had been aware of the Chinaman moving in the living room, the crackle of the small wood in the grate and later the roar of the flaming logs. It was Stephen's speaking that inhibited every suggestion of further sleep.

"Arrange a tray for Mrs. Claypoole," she heard distinctly in tones resonantly clear. "Coffee, fruit and toast, Ming."

Stimulated to action, Patricia crawled to the floor, every muscle uttering a separate protest. Rather would she have stayed under the blankets for the rest of the day. But she preferred going to the table for her breakfast than that Stephen should enter and find her in bed.

She shivered into her clothes swiftly, silently. Stabbing a pin into her collar, she peered out through the frosted window pane. The blizzard of snow and wind, threatened yesterday, had taken possession of the hills during the night.

What a wild world it was, this country to which Stephen had brought her! All of a sudden her life had been torn from its moorings and cast into just such a whirlpool of storm.

Again Stephen spoke outside, and she dashed precipitately to the door. But it took more than courage to open it. Another prod in the shape of an order to the Chinaman forced her hand to the knob.

"Get a vase of water, and put the roses in it, Ming," were the words that touched her deeply.

She opened the door, and, as she closed it, she gave timid greeting:

"Good-morning, Stephen! It's a fearful morning, isn't it?"

Stephen dog-eared his book and, rising, placed it on the shelf. He went ghastly pale as he noticed that she studiously kept her eyes averted from him.

"Good morning, Patricia! The blizzard's here to stay for a time, I imagine," he answered. "Come to the fire. I was just going to bring you some coffee."

"Thanks very much," she murmured, sinking into a chair. "I was quite able to get up. I don't want to put you to any bother."

A short silence succeeded during which Claypoole was striving for composure.

Finally, "Did the wind keep you awake?" he asked.

"No, not the wind," she replied, one hand clasping the back of the other. "I—I was thinking of you, Stephen."

The restraint he had placed on his nerves suddenly broke down. He forgot entirely that he had spent the night resolving never to speak one harsh word to her or one recriminating sentence.

"Why of me?" he demanded bitterly. "You loathe me so, you can't bear to look at me."

"Loathe him!" Why, she loved every inch of him! He knew that! She had told him so a million times! No, the person she abhorred with the fervor of a devotee for his religion, was Patrick O'Kelleron. She turned abruptly and met his brilliant, almost scornful eyes..

Against the background of the ice-embellished window, he appeared supernatural, uncannily gray to her afflicted, unbalanced mind.

Flushing painfully, she crouched again before the fire. She felt as if her body were wrapped in ice. But her head was so full it seemed ready to split open at any moment. The pounding in her ears was fearful. For an instant she grew tense with the longing to brave both the Pater's deathly presence and the memories of Patrick O'Kelleron and find her husband. But she relaxed into limpness when the thought went through her mind that Stephen was Patrick O'Kelleron and that her father had come again to haunt her away from the man she had married.

"I asked you why you were thinking of me," Stephen repeated.

Tears were brimming her lids, and tears were in her voice, too, when she answered:

"Why—why, I don't know—exactly, Stephen! But—but—I tried—to pray for you, and—and for myself."

"I suppose you thought Stephen Claypoole needed praying for," he mocked. "Did you mention in your petitions, Patricia, that I was a liar and a deceitful cad?"

"You know I did not," she breathed. "I want, oh, I want you to be happy, Stephen, and I want to be happy myself!"

He sat down in a chair so heavily that its joints creaked.

"And doesn't it strike you that you're taking a queer road to make either one of us happy?" he questioned.

"I don't know," she acknowledged, and surely she had told the truth. She had no understanding that would lead either one of them into a way of peace.

"But won't you talk to me, Patricia?" he burst forth. "Nothing can be different if you won't listen to reason. . . . You're breaking my heart."

As he spoke, he throbbed with mixed emotions. She was surpassingly beautiful this morning, even though she

was more ethereal than he had ever seen her. There was a babyish droop about her mouth, too, that mouth made for kisses, that drove him to madness.

"Then let me go away," she rejoined, "and—and forget—about me."

He sprang to his feet in such haste that his chair went tumbling backward, but he remembered, as he righted it, his resolutions of the past night.

"I forgot to say that there are letters here for you, Patricia," he said after a momentary pause. "I telephoned the messenger who brings up my mail to inquire for yours, too. Forgive me, dear, for saying what I did. I—I quite forgot myself. I—the fact is— Ah, here's Ming with the breakfast."

The appearance of the Chinaman put an end to Stephen's apology. Patricia seated herself before the coffee urn, and her husband, as if he were not in the least interested in them, passed her several letters which she took with a suppressed, "Thank you!" She glanced at them and laid them, unopened, beside her plate. Coffee, almost scalding hot, partially succeeded in washing down the marble-like ball that had cemented itself in her throat.

"Please eat something, do, Patricia," insisted Stephen as he noticed her untouched breakfast. "You don't eat enough to keep a bird alive! Won't you, dear? An egg, perhaps; some cereal?"

Because she wished to please him, she forced herself to eat a piece of toast. Then she went back to the grate with her letters in her hand.

There was one from Barney which, instead of bringing her joy, only piled on her agony. The money was a God-send. He had given in his notice. He would fly to New York to start the good work for Michael. She could write him at Cavendish's. He wished her a thousand happinesses and added:

"Here's hoping your new man deserves you, Paddy dear. Give him my congratulations on winning the finest, sweetest girl in the world."

A letter from Michael she slipped into her pocket. She dared not read it in her husband's presence.

She flung Barney's missive into the grate and sank back sighing. O'Kelleron money was already at work for Michael!

"I received a letter from my mother this morning," remarked Stephen when the silence grew oppressive. "She'll be glad when I get home."

"Do you know when you're going back?" Patricia asked, turning her head slightly.

"No, not yet! I can't say I do! I'd start for New York to-morrow night if you were better, but my first duty is to you—of course. My sweet, my own dear little girl—"

Time to finish his appeal was denied him because Patricia arose from her chair. Anguished, she glided into her room and closed the door. She could not endure the sadness in his dear voice. If for five minutes he were Stephen, one minute separated from the Pater and the hateful Patrick O'Kelleron, she could find a willing tongue to open her breaking heart to him.

Her room was warm now. Ming had set a grate fire going, and she sat down in front of it. She drew forth Michael's letter, but its reading gave occasion for bitter sorrow. It was so typical of the dear King, that letter. He was as happy as a fellow could be under the circumstances, he wrote. Yes, he hoped to get a new trial, but he did not want any one to worry about it, even if it could not be accomplished. He would very much like to see her and hoped she would come to Sing Sing as soon as she returned to New York. He sent her lots of love, and that sentence was almost illegible with his tears.

The morning passed drearily enough. She dared to issue forth to luncheon but ate alone, for Stephen stayed in the snugery.

Miserably she crept back to her chamber and spent the afternoon in vain planning.

CHAPTER XXV

FUTILITY stared Martin Brewer in the face. Although the fear that had loomed upon his horizon at Michael Pepperday's conviction had gradually lessened, he was swallowed up by a new, strange emotion,—that of detesting himself. He had never cherished the slightest conceit as to his genius or his intellectual power; but he had always believed in his work and adored it. Not at this juncture, though! Love had died on the tip of his pen, and, shocked at the tragedy, he had laid his manuscript aside.

In defense of Benny, who—now in a dangerous condition—called upon his protective instincts more than ever, he had prostituted his soul before a contemptible scarecrow. His *bête noir* was William Foster, or, to be more exact, the letters he had received almost daily from that young man, since he had requested him not to come to his office again until he was sent for.

In answer to Foster's effusions, Martin had sent hush money, but, as he told himself grimly, it was like throwing sand into a rat hole. Yet, he had to keep the rogue quiet until he found out just what Benny knew, just what he had done.

The thought continually gnawed at Brewer's consciousness that he ought to go to the District Attorney's office, make his statement and then thrust the bulk of his fortune between the law and his son.

Once he had actually gone downtown to rid himself of the monstrous secret, but, on reaching the prosecutor's office, he had tamely asked news of Patrick O'Kelleron instead. He had never been able to summon courage to

go again. He always salved his conscience with the assurance that sometime Benny would be well enough to confess just what he had done at Cavendish's.

For a long while he had hung in suspense between two evils, the lesser of which he had decided were Foster's blackmailing missives. To see the fellow every day or so, as he had at one time, to put himself in the way of a detailed conspiracy with the pestilential cur,—well, that he had not been invested with strength to stomach.

But now he had to endure an interview with Foster whether he wanted to or not. The mail had delivered a note from him that contained this terse statement:

"It's important that I should see you immediately. There's talk of a new trial for Michael Pepperday. 'Phone me an appointment."

Sighing, Martin fell to thinking about the Pepperdays. He recalled the hour he had helped carry the Pater to his grave in Balmville. The remembrance of his scenes with Adelina sent hot waves over him and surrendered his spirit to ignominious self-opprobrium.

But Adelina was not the only Pepperday whose shadow hung over him. Tucked away in his desk was Alf Carraby's letter from Montana, saying that Patricia had left the stock company and disappeared. At the same time Carraby had expressed the suspicion that her departure was connected with an unknown author who, so everybody said, wanted to marry her.

Hourly Martin had been hoping for some word from Lady Pat, and his present anxiety about her only sharpened his other worries.

Meantime William Foster was hurrying to obey Brewer's summons to call at his office. He had looked forward to this hour with avidity. Brewer would be as swift to give him the part he desired as he had been in keeping him supplied with cash.

He felt sure the playwright would checkmate any proceedings Michael Pepperday's officious friends might start. Of course, it was rough on Mike, but what happened to that sap-headed fool, as Foster considered the imprisoned youth, did not worry him at all. Any man who would let Milly pull the wool over his eyes deserved all he got. Metaphorically speaking, the actor had hugged himself into a state of warmth and contentment. He had completely forgiven Brewer for overlooking his appeals for personal interviews of late and with smiling satisfaction looked forward to a brilliant future.

As he guided his smart runabout to the curb in front of the Candler Building, his mind's eye held a picture of wealth and fame with none of the grind and poverty that generally impeded the rise of the artist.

He was overcome with self-importance and gratified pride when he tripped into Brewer's office.

"I'm delighted to see you again, Martin," he exclaimed with an outflung hand. "You can't imagine how I've missed our chummy talks. But I realize that you were too busy to let me come oftener."

"Sit down," came from the scarcely perceptible slit that was Brewer's mouth. "What do you know about the Pepperday matter, Bill?"

The actor shifted uncomfortably to a chair.

"Well, there's a movement afoot for a new trial, so I thought I ought to let you know as soon as I found it out myself," he replied.

"Where'd you get that bit of information?"

"Oh, from somebody who knows."

"What do you mean by somebody? Now, look here, Bill, when you do business with me, it's got to be open and aboveboard. I wouldn't talk in riddles with the devil himself. Out with the whole affair or nothing, and don't come here with mere gossip."

"Fancy Cavendish told me," admitted Foster after a spell.

"What? Are you fool enough to bring her stories here?"

Incredulity grew in Foster's narrow breast. Brewer acted as if he were not in the least intimidated. If that were so, why had he sent him all that money? He recalled his other interviews. Certainly he had been led to believe that by shutting his tongue between his teeth, he was doing him a favor. He was, too; he knew he was! Good Lord, it was a favor to keep his crippled son out of the muss! This thought made him pour forth a running fire:

"Now, you listen to what I'm going to say, Mr. Brewer! You needn't put on airs with me! I'm here to help you, but I can tip over your apple cart if I take the notion. So just remember that!" Very pale, he arose to his feet. "When you get ready to treat me like a friend, I'll come back and talk to you. Till you can hold your temper, I won't show up, but I might as well tell you some of the things I haven't put in my letters. I want more money, of course, certainly! I—I also want to play Michael Pepperday's part of 'David' in 'The Streams Make Glad!'"

As if a bee had stung him, Brewer sprang from his chair. Then he leaned against the table and laughed until the tears ran down his checks.

"Gosh—how—funny," he stuttered when he was able to articulate. "Thanks—for that—good laugh, Bill!"

"You'll laugh out of the other side of your mouth," gritted Foster, forgetting himself in righteous wrath. "I'm done fooling with you. In every one of my notes I've begged you to see me, but I didn't thrust myself upon you as I might have done. I came this time, willing to meet you more than halfway. Aren't you ashamed of your-

self, now, Mr. Martin Brewer? I repeat what I said. I want to play that part of 'David' with Paddy Pepperday as 'Truth' and Barney in his rôle: . . . I'm in love with Patricia!"

"What?" cried Brewer. "What in thunder did you say?"

He stood perfectly still as Foster repeated, word for word, what he had said with a few additions.

"That puts a new complexion on the matter," commented Martin gravely. "I say, Bill, come along into my directors' room, and we'll swap a few confidences."

His chest swelling with a sudden breath of relief, Foster jumped at the suggestion.

"Fine!" he said. "I'm glad you've come to see it my way after all."

As Foster went first across the threshold of Martin Brewer's directors' room, he took a quick glance about. A large table, around which were some ten or twelve chairs, occupied the spacious center. A baby grand piano, ready for use, was in the corner. In that instant he saw himself standing before it, practicing the powerful rôle of "David" in "The Streams Make Glad!"

Brewer's invitation to take a chair and make himself "comfy" gave him further assurance. There was nothing like carrying a project through high-handedly, especially with a haughty duck like the man before him. He could now specify his claims, and Martin would jump to grant them.

Never before had William been imbued with such overpowering self-esteem. Humph! He knew the calibre of Martin Brewer as if he had mixed up God's clay and made him. Big as he was, yes, rich as he was, Brewer was a "fraidy cat!"

"Barney Pepperday is back at Cavendish's," he announced, taking a glimpse at his green silk hose to make

certain there were no wrinkles in them. "Did you know that?"

"No!" answered Brewer, standing, his hands thrust into his pockets.

It placed a fellow at a disadvantage to have a man tower over him like that, and Billy wished he would sit down.

"Yes, he came in night before last," he explained. "Through some means he's got hold of a big sum of money. At first I couldn't see why in hell he wanted to come to a place like Cavendish's, especially after all that's happened. Of course, I've got my own reasons for staying there, but Barney's different. I was sure he had something up his sleeve—and he has! He's diggin' for new evidence!

"Fancy came to my room last night, and she told me that there'd been a man in Pepperday's room with him for over an hour. I bribed her to go back and keep an eye and ear out, and she did. She says the man was a lawyer. She heard Barney offer him a thousand dollars. I tried to quiz Barn myself, but he's some cagey guy, believe me. Beside that, Alexander Clark says that Pat O'Kelleron wrote his mother that he feared he'd made a mistake in rushing Mike's trial so fast. When he comes home, he's going to look into it.—Martin, I say it's gettin' pretty hot—for Benny. But I guess, as long as only you and I know the kid was in the house, you needn't worry.

"All I ask you to do is give to me outright—"The Streams Make Glad," and—"

"Outright!" interjected Martin. "Why, it's worth a mint, and I've already given you more money than you ever saw before."

"I know it, but isn't Benny's liberty, perhaps his life, worth a fortune. I counted it that way and thought, maybe, you would, too.

"I've always been ambitious," he stumbled on, "and I got to thinking what a success the Pepperday kids made in 'The Streams' and what a good actor I am myself! Friends of mine say I can sing prettier than Michael Pepperday—"

As Brewer winced, he paused, but, Billy's mode of fighting being to hit a man when he was down, he proceeded, "I can knock the spots off Mike's acting any day, and I didn't know how much I cared for Patricia until after she went west. You have a big pull with her, so I figured out that if you recalled her—"

"I gather from what you say, Foster," interposed Brewer quite calmly, "that you want to marry Miss Pepperday."

"Want to marry her?" echoed Billy, rolling up his eyes. "Well, I can say 'Yes!' to that with all my might. More'n that I *intend* to marry her! Say, she's the kind of a girl that looks clean through a fella and doesn't see him at all. But, after we're married, I'll take that high-cockalorum air out of 'er, you can bet your last dollar on that.

"Mart, you've had enough experience with women to know that a firm hand, and even a gadding once in a while, makes 'em understand the superiority of men. I know a vaudeville guy who drubs his wife every Sunday, whether she needs it or not. It keeps her straight all week. For a while I'll try that on Paddy Pepperday, just to show her who's boss. She'll eat out of my hands before I'm done with 'er. But, of course, I couldn't get her without you. She's the one big thing I want thrown in for—for my keepin' quiet about Benny."

To prevent himself from springing at the speaker, Brewer spread his feet wide apart. He was holding himself in by main force. He did not wish to commit an outright murder, and, if he struck Foster now, he would surely kill him.

His own machinations with this scum of the stage had made possible this incomparable harangue. His mind swept to Montana, carried on a whirlwind of rage and shame. But the picture of a pretty child, the girl who had portrayed his "Truth" with the tenderness and verity of an angel, softened the tense muscles in his throat. The word "Patricia" fell upon his ears, and he stirred.

"Isn't that so?" queried the actor.

"I didn't hear what you said, Bill," rejoined Brewer, "and you needn't trouble to repeat it. I was just wondering if I hadn't better lock the door. Yes, I think so."

He walked forward and turned the key.

"I did that, William, so that Scott couldn't run in if he happened to want me," he observed in explanation. "We can't be bothered by trifles for a while."

CHAPTER XXVI

WITH furtive alertness William Foster watched the manager as he turned and walked to the table, where he halted for no apparent reason. Foster wished he would make haste and draw up the contract. Until that was signed and sealed, he would be in more or less of a fret.

At the thought that he had cornered so powerful a man, Billy's small soul grew gleeful. But why did Brewer stand there like a stone image, his great head thrown back and his face as white as tallow? There was an expression, too, in his blue eyes, centered on space, that twinged the watcher with unrest.

During those few retrospective moments, Martin had traveled back to Benny's babyhood. There he had turned sharply and retraced his steps through the slow and weary years since the lad had become his fondest care.

Then, as a hacking cough came from the actor, he walked the length of the room and back again. Of a sudden his eye caught sight of the model of the stage set of "The Streams Make Glad," reposing on a shelf. Seemingly unconscious of his companion's impatience, he approached it softly, reverently, though with an inward agony, like that of a priest before his sacrificial altar.

Simultaneously William Foster's harpy-like demands faded from his mind; Forty-second Street took itself off; all its confusion and hubbub died out of his ears, for Martin Brewer had begun his wrestle with God. There, before the miniature Judean mountain with its Punch and Judy figures and its scraps of wool for sheep, the scales of doubt fell from his shrunken manhood.

His "old man of the sea" slowly resumed his innocuous form.

Then, through the quietude of Martin's material self, spiritual activity thundered its gospel of God-given pledges. For the first time since two weeks after Labor Day the everlasting truth was borne in upon him. Oh, eternal pledges of omniscient Love! Hope stirred in its long, leaden sleep and was suddenly erect in radiant splendor. He grasped the actuality of personal responsibility and individual independence expressed in the law, "work out your own salvation — for it is God that worketh with you—"

Then Benny's future slipped from his bleeding heart. His great shoulders lifted, and he sighed. He was free! Unfettered! Emancipated! Hallowed became the spot where he stood; enshrined the cardboard stage out of which his faith in abiding peace had been given back to him.

A sound startled him from his reverie. What was it? Ah, William Foster was humming audibly, "There is a River, the Streams whereof shall make Glad the City of God."

"Know what that is, Bill?" he asked with a backward thrust of his thumb at the model.

Flushing a rosy red, William slapped his brow with widespread fingers.

"Betcha," he grinned. "Great idea! That — is 'The Streams.' But what's the thing in the corner, a shepherd's crook, eh?"

"Yes! Sort of a one," ruminated Martin, picking up a rattan stick. "I bought it merely for the shape, to have one enlarged from it for Mike. Why, this," and he bent it double, "isn't big enough even for you."

With that he threw the crook on the table. Leisurely he advanced until he was within a few feet of his com-

panion, the expression on his face indicating that he was weighing a matter of extreme importance. Then a frosty smile expanded his lips, revealing two sets of unbroken, white teeth.

"Bill," he said impressively, "you say you came to do me a favor. Well, now I'm going to do you one."

"You'll never be sorry if you help me," Foster concurred, bobbing up with a low bow.

"I guess that's right," concluded Brewer thoughtfully. "When I once make my mind to do a thing, I'm rarely sorry. Just crawl up on that table, Willy!"

"What for, for God's sake?" gasped Foster, flinching; "and look here, I don't want you to call me 'Willy,' see?"

"All right, all right, just as you like," returned Brewer, flourishing a long arm. "It's immaterial what your name is when you're acting a part. I'm going to give you the leading rôle in a dance of the fairies. Hop up, Lizzie dear, hop up!"

"But I'm through with dancing," objected Foster, hectic in color. "I — I told you that, and — and you can quit calling me names, too."

"Hop up!" interrupted Brewer fiercely. "Up on that table, and face down, toadling!"

The space between them he covered with one step, a terrific, threatening figure.

Shrinking back, Foster stammered:

"Get away — from me — you — you! I'm — I'm — afraid! What's the matter, Brewer? What's the matter with you?"

Again that frozen smile spread Martin's lips to their fullest extent.

"Quit lookin' at me that way," shivered Foster. "I tell you I'm afraid of you! I say, what do you mean by tellin' me to hop up on that table? I — I won't! Don't you dare touch me! If you do, I'll holler."

At that moment Martin was almost feline. He knew he was scaring the fellow into chattering imbecility; but now he had started, he could not stop. One of his hands went out as though he were feeling for an invisible object. Then he withdrew it, only to shove it forth again, this time close to the actor's face.

Fingers, like talons, gripping Foster's collar, circumvented his move to dive under Martin's uplifted arm. Poor little mite of a man, struggling in the iron grip of a Cyclops! Then Brewer compounded insult and injury by elevating the song bird by the scruff of his neck completely off his feet and suspending him there as a cat would a rat.

"Willy," he boomed into the other's white, working face, "you're an abomination unto the earth. Now, I'm going to wallop the fear of God into you if I don't do another blessed thing on His footstool. If you were a man, I'd knock you down and do a few other things to you that go with a fine fight, but—"

On the brusque, explanatory "But" he stopped, and with one jerk whirled the dizzy actor aloft and landed him, spine up, on the table. Then, oh, kindly God in a kindly heaven, help! blubbered from Foster's racked soul. What was that? An object as cold as an icicle was traveling over the end of his nose.

"Smell that!" shot from Brewer. "It's a nice little shepherd's crook, made purposely to switch a naughty bad boy with, Willy. The Bible says, 'Spare the rod and spoil the child!' Now kick, little man, kick."

As the limber stick struck him across his back, "kick" was not the word to express the spraddles of William Foster. He squealed, not only with physical pain, but because his dignity—his high pride—was hurt beyond description. He could not endure the outrage another second. But the muscles he had displayed at times with

boasting were as soft as butter when he endeavored to wriggle from under the hand that held him down.

"Ah, you're magnificent, sweet boy!" exclaimed Brewer. "You're making the hit of your life! You've never done half so well before the footlights."

Another stinging blow from the flexible stick brought forth a series of yaps from Foster.

"Ah, does it hurt as bad as all that, darlin'," mocked Martin. "What a shame! It hurts me a thousand times worse than it does you, Willy child!"

"I'll have you arrested," shrilled Foster. "I'll have you jailed, you damned big brute. Let me go, I tell you."

Never had his falsetto tones taken their entire scope so thoroughly since he had discovered he possessed a voice. He blasphemed on the low notes, he screamed in the middle range, and he begged in childish treble.

Of a sudden Brewer paused with suspended arm. He scowled down at Foster who was sobbing limply.

"Lemme go, lemme go, sir," he implored, his hands in an attitude of prayer. "Oh, Mr. Brewer, how could you do such a thing, when I'm so anxious to save your son—so anxious to play 'The Streams Make Glad.'"

"Ha, ha, the little gnat hasn't learned his lesson yet, I see," cried Brewer. "I hoped he had! But a job like this, if it's worth doing at all, is worth doing well."

"One, two, three, four, five," he counted as the weapon descended. "How do you like what you said you'd give Paddy Pepperday, my weasel? Every Sunday, whether she needed it or not, to keep her straight through the week—eh? One, two, three, for your even daring to mention 'The Streams Make Glad!'—Immortal Muse! The pup would crucify the 'City of God!' Here's a couple of dandy whacks to ease thy weeping heart, oh, guardian angel of vocal harmony!"

He paused and grinned into Foster's tear-wet face.

"Oh, tweedle dee and tweedle dum, some spanking for a bad, bad son," he chanted in rhyme. "Now, two more for good measure! Good measure pressed down and running over! There! The dance is finished!"

Then Foster was so violently wrenched from the table and flung into a chair that he saw stars.

"Now, I'll hear what you're going to do, Bill," said Martin coolly, his temper gone.

Tears were pouring down Billy's cheeks.

"I want to hear what you're going to do first," he sniveled in muffled tones. "What I do depends on what you do."

Again Brewer lost his equanimity and became a menacing bulk of blazing flesh.

"The first thing I'm going to do is to kick you out of my office," he asserted, "and I'll add that Michael Pepperday shall have a new trial! I'll get in touch with O'Kelleron and help him open the case. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.—Now, you get out of here, you tango lizard, and don't come around me again. If you do, I won't bother to slap you. I'll—I'll sling you out of the window,—body, bones and breeches,—by God!"

He unlocked the door but did not open it.

"Now, Willy, I want to know something else." He spoke more civilly. "When're you going down to the District Attorney?"

No reply came from the actor, but hate flamed into and darkened his eyes.

"Ah, I see you leave here for there," divined Brewer swiftly. "Well, I'll go along, too, and I'll take down with us a bunch of your blackmailing letters. One of 'em will put you behind the bars for several years, and I'll see you get yours."

Then Foster tasted the bitterness of defeat. He

had lost, playing his own game. He was done for before he had begun his world-famed career! He was on his knees to the man he had been positive he held under his thumb.

"Oh, Mr. Brewer," he wailed, "I wouldn't treat you that way. I—I—I wouldn't go to the District Attorney's office for a hundred million dollars."

"Vamoose," growled Brewer, "and do anything you damn well like!"

Foster fled, and, as he crawled painfully into his car, he had the full realization that life was disrupted of everything worth while.

CHAPTER XXVII

ONE fixed idea raced around in Fancy Cavendish's mind: George was going to die before night. Her thin arms trembled so she could scarcely don her hat and coat. Wrapped in an old woolen cape, the parrot was squatted on a chair. His mistress was going to take him out of doors, and it was rainy and cold; so she had left no part of his body exposed save his glistening eyes and beak. When she had arrayed herself against the weather, she slipped the bird under her arm and climbed the basement steps to the street.

Once some one had told her that her father had died, and she had never seen him again. To-night she would not have George. She would be alone in the small, dark chamber where, ever since she could remember, he had kept her company. She was dumb with grief as the realization pressed upon her that the destruction of her beloved was at hand. She had but a short time to teach him all he must know before he went away to heaven.

Her face was smeared with tears when she slipped into a cold, damp court on Forty-seventh Street and squeezed herself in between two empty ash cans. Then, after caressing the parrot, she put him in her lap. He opened one eye and peered up at her.

"Hello, Fan," he singsonged.

"Hello, George," she droned, wiping her face on her sleeve.

"Nice day," said George.

"Nice day," she repeated.

Then the bird fell asleep, and Fancy made an effort to straighten out in her mind just what had happened.

Now, who was it that had said George had to die? She could not remember, and the harder she struggled to piece the broken threads, the more disordered became her brain. Rocking back and forth, she wept and moaned.

At length she bent forward and with trembling lips touched the ragged feathers that topknotted the parrot's pate.

"George," she breathed.

"Is breakfast ready, Fan?" asked the bird.

This remark was the cause of a low lament from Fancy. He would not eat any breakfast to-morrow. She would never have to steal from under her mother's nose the tid-bits for which he famished, and which she fed him in the seclusion of her own room.

"Kiss me, George," she mumbled, sobbing.

Obediently he pecked at her under lip.

"Now, listen to Fan, dear," she whimpered. "I'd like to help you if I could, but I can't. Before dark you'll be flyin' away up in the sky." Her voice cracked and ceased. After a while, "But God'll make it easy for my little man," she murmured. "I've been askin' Him all the way over. You got a soul, George, bigger'n most folks, and the minute your neck's twisted, Jesus'll grab you right up to heaven! I wish I could go with you, darlin'."

"Aw, Fan," muttered the parrot, disturbed at her tears.

"Ma don't like us much," she trailed on. "Nobody likes us awful well but Paddy Pepperday, and she ain't here. Oh, how I wish she was! How I wish she was, George!"

"George's a damn pretty bird," soliloquized the parrot. She squeezed him against her tremulous bosom.

"You're more'n pretty," she sighed. "Why, my golly, there's another parrot on the block, but he can't hold a candle to you. Be a good boy, and say your prayers once for your little mama."

"Lay me down to sleep," squeaked George, and he composed himself for another nap.

Among the tasks for Fancy to learn, Patricia Pepperday had listed the childish prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep," and that much of the petition George knew by heart from his small owner's diligent quoting.

"Say it again, 'Now I lay me down to sleep,' honey," she quivered. "I wish you'd learn the part about your soul, too. Sometimes you're so rotten mean that you won't do a thing I ask you.—Miss Paddy says Jesus loves little birdies' souls, George."

Then the child-woman, warped in all natural instincts but that of mother love which had spent its warmth for years on the bird, snatched him to her breast in passionate entreaty.

"Oh, God, let Fan keep George," she begged tensely. "Anyway, let me keep 'im till to-morrow.—George, if you don't say, 'I pray the Lord my soul to keep,' I'll paste you a biff on the jaw. Say it! Say it! The cat ain't got your tongue, has he? Open your mouth, and I'll see."

As if he understood perfectly the order given him, George opened his beak.

"Gold pencil for Fatty," he squawked, struggling to release himself from her light embrace.

A long shiver ran the length of Fancy's body. The parrot's jabbering about Michael Pepperday's pencil meant death for him. It never once occurred to her that it had taken her days to teach him those words.

Suddenly she tucked him under her arm, scrambled up and scuttled out of the court. No matter if the wind were cold, she did not intend to go home just now. George was warm, and that was enough.

She maundered along Forty-seventh Street with no definite thought of where she would spend the rest of the day.

Turning south on Fifth Avenue, she walked slowly along, glancing now and then at the shop windows. She harbored no envy for any one of the brilliant gewgaws displayed there. Patricia Pepperday supplied her with everything she needed.

A voice, sounding her name, set her heart to beating. In dread, she turned completely around.

An automobile had drawn close to the curb, and she heard her name again pronounced distinctly as she stared at the young man who was leaning out of the car door.

"Hello, Fancy!" called Benny Brewer, smiling at her. "Come on, and have a ride."

Not recognizing him at first, she hesitated. Then, relieved, she placed the pale, thin face as belonging to the boy who had come a few times to see the Pepperdays, and who once had given her five dollars. Undecided, however, she stood her ground but sent him a wan smile.

"Come on," he insisted, beckoning with his finger. "It's good and warm in here."

Never had she ridden in an automobile, and she was cold, too, so when he repeated the invitation, she sidled across the flags and slid into the tonneau beside him.

"Not a very nice day for a walk, Fancy," he remarked. "But I thought, perhaps, you'd like a ride."

"So I would, and George would like it, too, sir," she answered, her face flaming in excitement.

She unpinning the cape, unwrapped the bird, and he clawed his way up her sleeve to her shoulder.

"Pretty Poll, pretty Poll," he harped, as the car shot up Fifth Avenue. "Gold pencil! Lay me down to sleep, ma!"

Lifting her hand, Fancy placed it over his face.

"George's a bad boy to-day," she excused, "but it don't do no good to swat 'im. I'd beat 'im black and blue if it did."

"What did he mean when he said that?" asked Benny curiously. "I never heard a parrot talk so plainly before. I say, Fancy, what did he mean?"

"Nothing much, just a lot of rot," she apologized. "I guess he was sayin' his prayers for one thing. Where we going to, mister?"

"Oh, we'll take a little drive through the Park, and then we'll go up to my house. I'll play on my organ for you. Do you like music?"

She turned her head and looked at him.

"Lordy, I should think I did, and George loves it better'n most anything but cake. He gets all pin-feathery when we play the phonygraph. Ma says it gives 'im the pip, like it does her."

Then they were silent, except for the parrot's jargon, as the car took its way along the wet, winding roads of Central Park.

Benny's idea in giving Fancy Cavendish an outing was not all philanthropic. He wanted to talk about Patricia Pepperday. Several times he asked her questions to keep up the conversation, but she remained despondently huddled in the corner, watching the trees fly past.

Later, when she sat in Benny's studio, listening to his music, she forgot that death stalked on Forty-eighth Street, and that there was a lonely to-morrow awaiting her. The soothing harmony had lifted her vague senses into a blissful tranquillity. The bird, too, was very quiet.

"I bet you enjoyed that," Benny said, smiling.

"It was more'n grand," she returned emphatically. "Look at George! Every one of his feathers are standin' on end. He liked it like I did."

"What makes him act so fierce?" queried Benny.

The rapture, stamped in Fancy's pale countenance, faded away, leaving her jaded in expression. Furtively she glanced around the room and up at the galleries.

"I guess he's mad because I told him he's goin' to get killed," she whispered, again eyeing Benny. "His soul is goin' smack to Jesus before long. Somebody is goin' to wring his neck."

"Why?" questioned Benny disbelievingly. "Who's going to do it?"

"I can't tell you anything about that," she stated, touching her lips with her fingers. "But I wish—George didn't—have to—go to—heaven—just yet!" She uttered weak little sobs, her head sinking into the crook of her elbow. "Oh, I don't know how I'll live without him," she cried out to the amazed Benny.

"Goodness me—land, don't do that!" he exclaimed. "I say, Fancy, you make me feel badly! How would you like some cake and tea? I'll send down for anything you like."

She raised her face, streaked and wet, and then she contemplated him for a while as though she would assure herself that he had spoken the truth.

"George loves cake, sir," she announced, a smile flitting across her lips, "and, mebbe, if you give 'im some now, it'll be the last he'll get. Ma's as stingy as the devil when it comes to sweeties." She bent forward. "You remember that five dollars you gave me one night?"

Ah, did he remember? He merely nodded.

"I spent every cent on George," she declared with a wise wag of her head. "Ma never knew I had it."

"Then I'll have some cake sent up," he promised, and he went to a speaking tube into which he spoke words which were unintelligible to the thrilled Fancy.

"Come on, and tell me what's going to happen to your parrot," he coaxed, once more seating himself. "I won't tell anybody. I swear I won't."

"Somebody hates 'im awful!" she admitted, embarrassed. "I hadn't oughta said a word about it, but—but,

mebbe, he won't be alive five minutes after I get 'im home to ma's, sir."

"Then I'd be switched if I'd take him back there!" came in ejaculation. "Gee, some mystery about that bird! Eh—Here's the tea.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, laughing up at the liveried butler who had advanced with the tray, "I forgot to say 'jam,' but you brought it, didn't you, Todkins? And sandwiches!—Yes, I'll call down if there isn't enough, Toddie!"

The servant stared at the young stranger, then at the parrot, murmured a few words and went out.

"You sit here," invited Benny hospitably, "and help yourself to whatever you want."

"I'd like George to have my share, mister," she gulped, dropping into the chair. "If there's anything he loves, it's cake soaked in sugared tea, and he'll never get another chance like this."

"There's enough for us all," Benny responded, sitting down, "and, if there isn't, we'll shout for more, like a house afire. But look here! If you're sure about that killing stuff, why don't you leave the bird with me? You could see him whenever you liked; I wouldn't mind if you came every day. And you needn't tell any one where you left him. That would be better than having him die, wouldn't it? Begin and eat now, while I pour the tea."

Thoughtfully Fancy helped herself to a sandwich, broke it in two and offered the parrot the larger portion.

"George hates being away from me," she explained presently, "and, when he's ugly, he'll nip you till the blood runs. He picked three huncks off'n a man's hands just to-day. And he bit ma's thumb almost off when she tried to box his ears."

Chirruping, Benny leaned across the table and extended

his forefinger. The parrot cocked his head on one side and blinked. Then in stately dignity he lifted his wings and jumped to the lad's shoulder.

"Well, for the love of Mike," gasped Fancy, "wouldn't that rattle your grandmother's slats? He never did that before; he hates strangers."

"But he likes me; that's why he came without any fuss," laughed Benny. "All kinds of animals take to me straight off. Here, Sir George, get down here and eat a bit of chocolate. Well, will you look at him pick up that spoon and see him dig into the jam!"

With pride Fancy gazed lovingly upon her adored pet, then back to Benny.

"That's nothing," she bragged. "He can eat a dinner all the way from soup to nuts. Ma swears he's got a tapeworm or something worse. I guess he knows you're an awful nice man. Paddy Pepperday said you were as good as gold."

"Did she—honest?" glowed Benny. "Tell me everything she said. I'll give you five dollars if you will!"

Along toward dark, warmed in body and spirit, Fancy Cavendish took her departure from the Brewer home, leaving the parrot contentedly asleep in Benny's studio. Little did she realize that her earnest, humble petition, "God, let me keep 'im," sent up while she crouched between the ash cans, had won for her darling the protective care of omnipresent Love.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"It's another nice day, isn't it, Stephen?" Patricia observed some three weeks later, as she emerged from her room at breakfast time. Her voice was evenly toned, and Stephen glanced up suddenly with the passionate hope that she would look at him.

Interminable days of blizzard and terrific wind, howling around the "Eagle's Nest," and ten days of brilliant sunshine had almost sent him beyond the bounds of reason. The passing of each twenty-four hours had left him more desperate and nerve-racked than the preceding ones. Not to his knowledge had his wife deigned to glance his way in all that time, nor had he succeeded in wheedling her into a lengthy conversation. Yet, she was infinitely sweet and tantalizingly relaxed whenever he spoke upon other than personal topics.

One minute he would declare to himself that he had married a crazy woman; another sixty seconds animated him with the belief that she had been stricken with a lingering illness, the like of which had never come under his eye. Certainly his experiment in bringing her to the "Eagle's Nest" was turning out disastrously. Daily she was losing flesh and color.

There were, though, moments during which she seemed to be alive to the things passing around her. For instance, the morning post usually delivered her various pieces of mail, and the anxious husband noted that she read the lengthy epistles several times, after which they immediately found their way into the leaping flames, only to be carried up the chimney in charred, broken fragments.

Not once had she spoken of their contents, nor had she condescended to acquaint him with the names of her correspondents.

He was watching her keenly now as she walked to the table.

"Yes," he answered, "it is a nice day, and the postman says the road to Butte is in good shape."

"Ah, I have just one letter," she said, picking up a thick envelope.

When he saw her thin face go pale, a stab of jealousy went through him like a knife. He was more than interested in that letter. He had inspected it on putting it beside her plate. It was postmarked "Ossining, N. Y." and was addressed to "Patricia Rushmore, Butte, Montana," in a large, bold handwriting.

Twice before since their marriage he had witnessed the same scene over the same kind of a letter,—her sudden rigidity, her deathly pallor and the manner in which she snatched it up. Unlike her other mail, she had not read these letters until she was alone. What had the writer to do with her present condition? Although he had desired to know its contents, a desire which was more insistent this morning than either time before, Stephen had not been tempted to open it.

"Did you sleep well?" she asked sweetly, taking her seat in front of the coffee urn and slipping the letter, address down, beside her plate.

"No, I can't say I did," he rejoined, an impatient note in his voice.

"I'm sorry," she murmured. That was all!

She poured his coffee, sugared and creamed it with care. When Stephen took it from her, he touched the small hand under the saucer.

A quick rage took root in his heart when she drew her arm back as if she had inadvertently come in contact with

a snake. He wondered darkly if she would shrink in such an evident fashion from the man at Ossining. He felt like flinging the question at her but refrained. His tongue was stiff, his mouth dry, in spite of the cup of hot coffee he had swallowed without taking breath.

As usual, when Patricia had finished her breakfast, she picked up her mail and arose languidly.

"Stay here a few minutes, Patricia," he said. "I want to talk to you."

With the letter in her hand, she dropped obediently into an armchair and waited for him to proceed.

It was now firmly rooted in Stephen's consciousness that another man was at the bottom of their trouble. She was dying slowly by inches.

"Child," he exclaimed swiftly, "in spite of your protestations against it, I'm going to send for a doctor. You won't eat, and I don't believe you sleep enough. It's no wonder you're getting thin."

"But I'm not at all sick, Stephen," she objected. "I really feel rested this morning. I slept better last night than I have before since I've been here."

"I wish I could say the same," he replied bitterly. "Patricia, we can't go on all winter like this. It's getting on our nerves."

"Yes, I'm sure it is, but, perhaps, after a while, we'll feel better," was all she offered.

"I don't know about that. To my knowledge you haven't given me a look of any kind since we've been here," he countered, thankful that she had not taken flight. "Do you dislike me so much as all that, dear Patricia?"

"No! You've made a mistake! I have looked at you—often," she said. "Perhaps, you didn't see me, but I have just the same."

"Turn around here now," he said with vehemence.

To hear Stephen's dear voice and see the Pater's blue lips move,—ah, that was a chance she dared not risk.

"I don't want to," she shivered. "My head would ache if I did."

Difficult, indeed, it would have been to measure the resentment that welled up in Claypoole. It temporarily eclipsed his love and obscured his judgment. Before he could speak, Patricia choked:

"May I please go to my room, Stephen? I'd rather be by myself—if you don't mind."

"Not yet," he protested. "I haven't finished what I wanted to say."

"I can't see that there is anything for either of us to say," she endeavored to answer quietly. "Of course, I'll listen to whatever you have in mind. I'd feel better, though, if—if I could return you that money—that five thousand dollars."

His resolution not to be other than kindly went to pieces under her assertion. His pulses were leaping hotly with jealous suspicion, and she had lacerated his feelings until he had lost his sense of proportion.

"Patricia, don't ever dare to mention that wretched affair to me again," he charged stormily. "If you persist in it, I don't know what I'll do to you. For some reason or other, you seem determined to offend me this morning."

Never had he spoken thus to her before. His tones were rough, and she shriveled into a small heap as the thought flashed through her mind that Patrick O'Kelleron was revealing himself. She struggled to her feet, the letter hanging loosely from her fingers.

"Why, no, no! I'm not!" she expostulated, "and, of course, I won't mention it again if you don't want me to. Please forgive me, Stephen."

The wounds which she had inflicted upon him were too deep for her small plea to heal.

"Forgive her?" Yes, he told himself savagely, he would forgive her when he had read that letter. He honestly believed he had discovered the basis of their trouble. He would drag the thing out into the open, whatever it was, and destroy it as he would an uncovered nest of rattlesnakes.

"Give me that letter, Patricia," he gritted between his teeth.

Her fingers closed spasmodically about the missive.

"I couldn't," she refused. "I couldn't do that!—It's mine!—I don't ask to see your letters, do I, Stephen?"

For an instant he was silent.

"You certainly do not," he retorted, his voice hard. "Evidently nothing of mine concerns you, but I can't say I feel the same way. Who's the man that writes you from Ossining? You've received two letters from him before since we've been here.—Give—give me that letter!"

The words, "My brother, Michael," flew to her lips, but a glance at him killed them before they escaped. A great pain shot through her temples. She shuddered at the duality of a living, erect body and the fixed, dull stare of the dead. She turned partly away, completely disorganized.

"I think I've quite lost my senses," she said slowly.

Suddenly impressed with the belief that she was acting, he became beside himself with fury.

"Yes, I'm sure you have," he whipped out. "At least your judgment is poor. I've stood just about all I'm going to. Give me that letter. I will see it."

"And I say you shall not," she gulped. Her lips quivered, but she went on, "How — how dare you —"

Her faltering question was not completed, because Stephen bounded to her side, snatched hold of her arm and endeavored to wrench the letter from her hand.

"Stephen!" she screamed at him. "Stephen, don't—don't!"

"Let me have that letter then, Patricia," he hissed. "Give it to me, or I'll take it away from you."

"No, no, you wouldn't do that," she contradicted, "you couldn't! Stephen, don't! You're hurting me—so! Oh, my arm!"

"If you don't want me to hurt you, Patricia," he threatened hoarsely, "let me have—"

Then by an effort, tremendous for one so delicate, she jerked herself free and threw the sealed envelope into the grate.

Stephen bit an oath in two before it was uttered. He snatched the tongs and shoved them into the fire. A blazing log rolled from the andirons on to the stone hearth. The letter lay among the red embers, crisp and brown, and at a savage poke of the tongs it fell apart in ashes.

When he stood up and looked at his wife, much of his passion left him. She was marble-white, clinging to the back of a chair, her wrist marked with welts where his fingers had been. Contrition for his unwarrantable action tussled with the green-eyed monster that still battled at the portals of his soul.

"Patricia," he ejaculated in a wretched state, "tell me who wrote it. Oh, I must know, dear! God, I must, I must!"

As though she had not heard his appeal at all, she still stared into the grate, shockingly unnerved.

"My letter! My darling's letter!" fell tonelessly from her lips. "It's burned, gone! My boy's letter, and—and I wanted it—I wanted it!"

Then she fled the room, weeping hysterically.

Stunned and panting, Claypoole fixed unseeing eyes upon the door that shut her in. He was frozen cold with

the sudden solving of the riddle which had forced him to an execrable act. His wife loved another man! In the east, at Ossining! The man lived there! Then, why, in God's name, had she married him? Why? Why?

Mechanically he poked the smouldering log back upon the fire dogs, staggered into the snugery and closed the door as though some loved one lay a corpse under the roof.

Patricia had not loved him in the least when she had married him, his reason asserted. His throbbing soul insisted that she had. His judgment rapped smartly against this possibility. All her sweet protestations in those few pre-wedding days had been false! To this, denials from the very center of his being came swift and fast. She *had* loved him! Of that he was sure!

Questions for which he found no answers continued to beat upon him through a long, dreary forenoon.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE luncheon gong, cutting through the silence, aroused Stephen Claypoole to the conviction that he had plodded through an interval of intense suffering. Strong as he was in body and mind, his emotional struggle had left him quivering with nerves and indecision. Again and again he had rehearsed the scene of that morning, and each bitter finish of each rehearsal had but more firmly persuaded him that Patricia loved another man.

His better self told him the generous thing to do would be to release her. He remembered his violent wooing in Butte. He had given her not a moment to think. He had carried her completely off her feet, and she had married him before she knew what she was doing. Yes, he must set her free.

But there were his heart and his husbandhood hammering against that course of action. She was his by every written and unwritten law of God and man.

Yet, did she belong to him, if she did not love him? Love, and love only, made a man and a woman one in thought and purpose.

His red hair literally stood on end when he ejaculated aloud that he would not let her go. She had married him. She was his wife, and so long as he stood in his shoes above ground, the fellow in the east should never have her.

In utter weariness he drew himself up as the gong rang once more. With no desire to eat, he went into the living room where Ming slip-slapped to and fro, arranging the noon meal. Patricia was nowhere to be seen, nor could Stephen catch a sound from behind her closed door. He knocked and then knocked again.

"May I bring you a cup of tea, Patricia?" he called. And her suppressed, "No, thanks!" sent him headlong to the table.

"I don't want any luncheon, Ming," he said curtly. "Clear the stuff away."

The afternoon proved to Stephen more galling than the morning. In desperation he put on his coat and cap, went out of doors and wandered through the mountains. On his return he found the house not a whit less irksome.

As the day advanced, a hell of jealousy descended upon him in proportions so huge that it wiped away the benevolent promptings which had been conspicuous above his pained pride and which had tempered his impatience. He had been robbed. A thief had stolen into his chancel of love and seized his dearest treasure.

It was nearly dinner time before he would admit to himself that Patricia was the pirate. She had led him into a fool's paradise. She had worse than deceived him. His sense of justice would not allow him to hold up the man at Ossining for punishment. Patricia, exquisite Patricia, with all her alluring loveliness, had worked him measureless harm. Stretched to his fullest height, his soul ravaged by pain, he vowed he would readjust matters between them.

Patricia's day had been unlike Claypoole's in that she has stayed in her room, abandoned to grief. Now and then, she moved to replenish the fire. Although the weather was far more mild than during the first days of her exile at the "Eagle's Nest," there were forlorn moanings and whisperings outside that doubled and tripled the dark melancholy of the place.

She longed intensely for Stephen, the Stephen she had married. The man who had torn Michael's letter from her was Patrick O'Kelleron.

At length the only thought her diseased brain held

was that he had slain Stephen as he had the Pater. She counted her man no longer in that esoteric trinity of husband, father and devil. She wanted to die, to follow Stephen into eternity where she would never be separated from him again.

The idea of her own demise lifted her quickly to her feet.

She remembered once in Butte admiring a beautifully etched knife in a Japanese shop. Stephen had bought it, laughingly telling her that it was sharp enough to pierce a pine knot.

Extracting it from the ivory scabbard, she contemplated the slender, shining blade. What she intended doing with it impelled her back to the grate. She sat down, wholly bewildered. Then the door opened, and her husband walked in, and, as if he had struck it from her hand, the knife slipped down beside her into the chair.

"Patricia," he began, shutting the door, "I've brought you something to eat."

He spoke very sternly, as he had that morning when he had demanded the letter. She closed her eyes and remained as quiet as her throbbing nerves would allow.

"I refuse to let you go without food any longer, my dear," he continued in the same imperious manner. "Here's a bowl of bread and milk and a little brandy in hot water."

"I don't want it," she succeeded in telling him.

"But you're going to take it, nevertheless," he returned. "It's ridiculous the way you act. Sit up instantly, and do as I tell you. I shall feed you myself, if you don't, Patricia.—Drink this!"

She sniffed the pungent odor of the brandy under her nose.

"It smells horrid," she stammered, and she pursed her lips.

"Drink it!" ordered Claypoole.

She gulped it down in resignation.

"That'll brace you up a bit," he stated. "Patricia how do you expect to find the way to your mouth unless you open your eyes?—Here!"

If he had not been obsessed by the memory that she had called the man in Ossining "darling," he would not have strangled the pity that stirred within him when she dropped the spoon which he had thrust into her fingers.

"Why, you're so weak, you can't hold it," he ejaculated, "and it's nothing but your crying that has brought you to such a shocking state. I wish I had taken you in hand before. If I had, this hateful affair would have been settled long ago. I must talk to you, but that's impossible in your present condition. I'll put this pillow under your head. Like that! You're shivering, too."

Reaching for a blanket, he placed it around her shoulders.

She opened her lips to speak but closed them again. She thought to acquaint him with the fact that weakness had not relaxed her fingers. He had scared her silly, that was all. As Claypoole saw her sigh against the soft pillow, he was again compelled to believe that she was acting for his benefit. It was a nasty idea, but he had nursed it nearly all the afternoon.

"Patricia, I order you to cease shaking that way," he said curtly. "If you think I don't mean what I've said, you're very much mistaken.—Lie quiet until I fix your food."

Then he went to the table where he broke the bread into the milk.

"Are you willing to eat now?" he asked, straightening.

"I can't," she answered painfully. "My throat's sore."

Frowning, he picked up the spoon and wiped it on the napkin.

"Surely it is," he replied. "A girl can't cry for hours and not have a sore throat. But, in spite of that, you must eat this.

"I'm sorry, my dear, that you make me do something very much against my liking," he went on severely. "But I've come to the conclusion that a great deal of your headache has been caused by your refusal to take food." Sitting down beside her, he dipped into the milk. "Open your mouth, Patricia, and eat this bread."

"I couldn't swallow it," she sobbed. "Oh, I couldn't!"

"Yes, you can, and you must, Patricia. Do you want me to feed you forcibly?"

"No," she breathed. "No, no! I—I will in a minute."

He waited with the full spoon in his hand. He could hear his heart thumping as if it were located in his ear drums. His conscience gave him a twinge as he gazed at her, but instantly he hardened his heart. How she must have suffered over that damnable letter! By the look of her, she had cried all day. He would have no more of it.

"Open your mouth immediately," was his austere command.

She ate slowly, swallowing with difficulty. Finally the bowl was empty, and he stood up. She was very quiet now, her face unlined and childlike and peaceful. Of course, the brandy had calmed her; it had put her to sleep, too, he concluded.

Before going out, he hesitated, his loving heart yearning over her. If he left her in the chair, she might not waken until morning. Surely he had been unnecessarily cruel to let his jealous temper run away with him in such a manner. She could not help loving the man at Ossining any more than he himself could help loving her. That thought had not occurred to him before. It put

another light on her conduct. Yet the phrase, "My darling's letter," mocked him. As he placed the bowl on the tray, a shudder shook his enormous frame. Another man, whom he was unable to visualize, rose up between him and the tiny, reclining figure with taunting reality, and a racking sob left his lips. He could not keep her. To lift her into life and love once more,—he knew of but one way.

"Patricia," he exclaimed in husky misery.

"What?" she queried drowsily.

"Listen," he begged.

"Well?" she said, her head bobbing as she attempted to raise it.

Pushed to the very end of his strained wits, he sat down.

"Poor, little girl! Poor, unfortunate child!" he murmured brokenly. "Patricia dear, won't you go to bed?"

In her effort to throw off the cloud of slumber, she stirred. That tender, beautiful voice was Stephen's. One of her small hands lifted, and he caught it as it fell. She did not withdraw it, and Stephen clasped it closer.

"I'm very tired," she whispered.

"Of course, you are, dear. I know you are," he agreed, "and I frightened you! I'm so sorry, oh, so sorry!"

"My head aches, too, Stephen," she told him. "It's strange—my head—on top here. It hurts!"

"But if you go to bed and to sleep," he argued, "you'd feel better in the morning. Will you—now? And please don't cry any more."

Stephen's voice suddenly failed him, and he bent forward and laid his lips on her hand. Then he was stung with the recollection that in a spiritual sense she did not belong to him, no matter how his mighty desire clamored for her.

"Dear, sit up now," he urged softly. "Why, you're quite dead with sleep, poor baby!"

"I know it," she admitted. "By and by, I'll go to bed."

"But I can't leave you like this," he persisted. "Rest, dear child, while Stephen takes down your hair. No, you don't even have to move. I'll do it very carefully."

Already she was well on her way to the land of Nod, and, as she made no reply, hot blood raced to his temples. He was going to put her to bed! But just how to begin, he had not the least notion. He had no idea where to find the garments she needed, and his knees were weak as he walked over to turn down the light. Then he went to the wardrobe and opened it.

There he discovered a heavy nightdress, spanning two hooks. White to the ears, he flung it over his arm and crept across the room. From the dresser he gathered up a comb and a brush, and he turned to take note of his wife's ebony curls, mysteriously pinned about her shapely head.

In puzzlement his fingers made a swift run through his own red hair. Where should he start on this unfamiliar task that had suddenly loomed before him as a duty? He extended one hand but drew it back again.

"Patricia," in an undertone.

She was sound asleep, and he did not call her again. He reached forth and pulled out three hairpins at one time. He blinked at them an instant, then laid them side by side with mathematical precision on the table. Encouraged, he once more dove into her dark curls.

When the last pin was out, and her hair came showering down about her white face, he stood up in bewilderment. Then, with his under lip caught between his teeth, he ventured to pass the brush the length of her hair.

"Heaven help me not to pull it out by the roots," he supplicated, brushing bravely.

Evidently he was helped, because he managed to

untangle the curls and twist them into an irregular misshapen braid.

There, that part was done! But more was to follow!

When he lifted her out of the chair, she sighed, and her head fell against his breast. She was but a featherweight in his embrace. Such a little girl—his wife! He changed his invocation from "God help me!" to "Oh, God, let me have strength to *help* her!"

On his slow journey through the shadowed room, there surged through him the resolve that to-morrow he would make her happy. To-morrow they would start for New York—and from New York to Ossining. He had discovered in his fraternal ministrations that, no matter what happened to him, he must revive in her the wish to live. His darling's happiness before his own always!

The wind mourned over the mountains drearily. All of a sudden he became conscious of it, and it seemed, as he held to his breast the woman who had made barren his soul, that there were human beings out there, chained in the wilderness, as he was to be chained to long years of future desolation. With that thought in mind he flung up his head.

"Thou, God, who hast never been tempted by a woman's sweetness," he prayed, "help—help me—to give her up! Amen!"

As he laid her gently down on the bed, he repeated through strained lips, "Help me now, God! Help me to-morrow, too!"

By the time he had made her ready for rest, he was quite used to praying. The fact is that from the moment he started that difficult task of locating buttons until her small, cold feet were encased in the knitted night slippers, "Dear God, help us both!" and "Oh, God, help!" were poured into the ear of the Infinite in rapid succession.

It was only when he stood inside the snugger door

that he realized fully how much his burning petitions had bolstered up his manhood. He had not changed his mind. To-morrow he would give her back to happiness.

And Patricia slept, and in her dreams there walked a procession of figures,—strangers with dark faces and leering smiles. From what seemed a great distance away Alf Carraby and Ruth Howland waved their hands to her. Then they dissolved into Sing Sing prison where she followed them, only to see Michael behind bars through which she could not reach him. She was running away from the beleaguered place when she saw the Pater and Stephen float towards her.

Both were smiling, and her own lips curled a little in response. She had thought they were both dead. She stirred in her sleep when the Pater took one of her hands, and Stephen, his brown eyes glowing, came directly to her, as she pronounced his name aloud.

Then it seemed as if they lifted her completely off her feet and carried her away through illimitable spaces. They rode forth like the wind. How blissfully safe she felt between the two of them. Then she thought they suddenly alighted on the top of a huge mountain. She struggled when she saw the "Eagle's Nest." She cried out against going into the house, but the next thing she knew she was in the living room, alone with her father.

"Where did he go, Pater love?" she asked. Then, more sharply, "Where is my husband?"

And the Pater, all at once become a wizened, unsmiling and death-white wraith, answered:

"He's dead. Patrick O'Kelleron killed us both. His life is none too precious to pay his debt to the Pepperdays."

Her head turned restlessly on the pillow as if she were striving to throw off the hateful nightmare. But she became quiet again and went on dreaming. Hideous

pictures passed across her mind, like demon figures moving over a screen. Patrick O'Kelleron glowered darkly before her sleeping vision. She wanted to kill him; she intended to kill him! It was her duty, her sacred duty to Stephen, to the Pater.

Like a small, white ghost, she drifted from the bed. She might have been wide-awake, so easily did she locate the knife that had slipped down between the chair arm and the cushion.

With it clasped in her fingers, she flitted across the floor and, like a shadow, was gone.

The silvery tone of the mantel clock struck "one" as Stephen Claypoole opened his eyes. In his pajamas and dressing gown he had fallen asleep, reading, and the green-shaded lamp had burned dim since the book had dropped aside.

For a time he sat, stupidly wishing he were in bed. Aye, that it was morning, rather! There would be no more sleep for him that night!

All in an instant he was impressed with the feeling that he was not alone. He turned his head and for a moment imagined that, out of the past agony and his own superlative love, he was seeing some one who was not there at all. That shrinking, white figure, kneeling within touching distance, was not his wife! She was forbidden to him; her own wish had caused the separation which lay but a few hours off. He had been in consummate torment so long that his brain was conjuring phantoms.

"Patricia, Patricia," he exclaimed.

Then, when a short sob reached him, he knew she had come to him at last. Joy flooded through him in such measure that hot tears were wrung from his eyes. She loved him! Nothing—nothing but a great revelation could have conquered her maidenly reserve.

"My darling," he breathed, laying his hand on her

bowed head. "You've come to forgive me, dear. You've forgotten all my wickedness. You're mine—now—mine!"

He sprang from the divan, still talking in swift, jerky sentences.

She was wide awake but too bewildered to move. Hazily she remembered that Stephen had brushed her hair, that he had to put her to bed. Then the dream came back, like some ugly tale.

"Let me—stay here a minute," she breathed. "Forgive—forgive me!"

"There's not one thing for me forgive," he murmured. "You don't have to stay on your knees to me, my Patricia. That you are here—that you've come of your own accord.—My precious—let me hold you in my arms."

Overcome by whipping emotion, he knelt down beside her, fixing her with a lingering, hungry gaze. He touched her arm, and Patricia clutched his hand.

"I came — in — here — to — kill — you, I guess," she gasped. "I think I must have."

"And it almost did kill me!" he returned hoarsely, disregarding the dire significance of her faltering speech. "How beautiful you are! How white you are! Darling, don't tremble so. Don't you understand you're here with me, and that I love you—that I love you better than all the world—better than myself!"

He snatched her roughly, desperately, to his breast as she pleaded brokenly that he listen, please, please, to something she had to tell him.

"Put your arms around me," he begged, and he kissed her fervently again and again. "How beautiful your hair is! Dear curls—my curls! I'm starved—starved! How I've wanted you—you,—sweet,—just you!"

As if he intended never to let her go, he strained her against him, nor did her stammering pleas sink into his consciousness.

"How awful these days have been, my dear, dear love!" he murmured. "But they're over forever. Listen to me, Patricia! Stop crying, or you can't hear what I say. Everything is forgotten as if it had never been! I love you!—How wee you are! Only a small, small armful! You're in my arms, darling! Your head is where it ought to be. I shall never let you go again."

On and on he rambled, promising her his lifelong devotion, his love, his constant care. His musical voice, deep-toned with passion, soothed her to silence. She felt his warm tears on her face. She was living in that day when the Prince of Peace was returned to her—through Stephen. She had forgotten the Pater, the knife and Patrick O'Kelleron.

Suddenly he held her out on his hands with one magnificent, tragic gesture.

"Dear Father in Heaven, Thou hast given me back Thy choicest gift—my wife!" he said. "And I—I, Patrick O'Kelleron, swear to Thee—"

Patricia's scream cut into his oath and checked it. As she struggled, he drew her back and covered her mouth with kisses until he lost all control of himself. He remembered nothing but that she had broken down the barrier between them.

When he ceased kissing her, her head fell helpless against him.

"Oh, Christ in Heaven, how I love you, dear—my dear," he cried thrillingly. "Oh, heart of mine, how I love you!"

CHAPTER XXX

THE dawn was struggling out of a dark, frost-bound night as Stephen Claypoole raised his head and peered into the shadowy room. At first his thoughts were confused. All his sensibilities refused to answer his mental demand, "What—what happened?"

Before he came upon the answer to his question, his eyes fell upon Patricia over near the window. She was curled up in a big chair under a cover, her lids lowered, her face, blue-white, resting on her delicate arm. She looked as if she were dead!

Then he remembered, and shamed blood colored his face. He recollected that, when he had fallen asleep, she had been belted tightly within his arms, and that she had been very quiet, very subdued. His refusal to listen to her explanation why she had crept into the snuggery rose up and confronted him.

Silently he slipped from the bed and tiptoed across the room. His eyes slowly filling with tears, he gazed down upon her. Now, in the gray, morning light, he was ravaged by regret and remorse. She had begged for a few little minutes in which to tell him something. She had cried that she had come to kill him. And he had laughed. How his own answer tormented him!

"I don't care, my sweet, what brought you here. I'm willing to die in your arms. I won't listen to anything. I won't! I won't! I want you now—you, always!"

He cursed his self-indulgent egotism. Then he added fresh curses upon his unquenched desires which at this moment almost forced him to take her, sleeping though she was, again into his arms. He could find no excuse

for himself, as he recalled how he had madly locked the door when she had endeavored to escape to her own chamber. He had put the key far out of the reach of her slender, pleading arms. He shot a glance to the picture molding. Yes, there it was, gleaming at him like a brass eye. Every word she had uttered, her every sobbing appeal, yes, every tear she had shed seemed to attack him, to display his conduct to his true self with bitter recrimination. Why had he not listened? Why had he not given a thought to the appalling fact that she loved another man. She would have confided in him if he had given her time. She had begged him to hear her, and, gross brute that he was, he had refused. He writhed in mental torture. This battle to retain his self-esteem was, indeed, a wracking experience.

He dreaded, yet insupportably longed, for her to waken. Of course, she would insist on leaving him immediately. The thought covered him with cold sweat. Where yesterday he had adored her to the point of delirium, now his heart of hearts encompassed her around and about, leaving no opening through which she could escape to the man at Ossining.

Blindly he stumbled away, procured the key, gathered up his wearing apparel and vanished.

A throng of bitter memories pried open Patricia's eyes a few minutes later. It was an appreciable time before she realized that she was still in the snuggery. Then the material things around her swung dizzily in circles as memory, in lightning flashes, went across her brain. That slender sharp knife! And she had dreamed of killing Stephen with it! No, not Stephen! Patrick O'Kelleron! Under the blanket her body became like goose skin. She could not have been colder if she had stood naked in a storm.

She remembered she had been gripped for hours in her

husband's arms, and she turned from that happening as from a cup of gall and wormwood. Nothing was of consequence but that she had not murdered Stephen.

The knife, where was it? Had it just been part of her dream that she had brought it with her?

She sprang up. Last night she had awakened over there by the divan. Yes, there it was! In another instant she had secured it and was back under the blanket.

A familiar squeak announced the opening of the door, and Stephen walked in. She did not move or speak. She heard him place a table at her side, and the odor of coffee came to her nostrils.

"Drink this, Patricia dear," he entreated humbly. "I'll keep Ming in the kitchen for an hour. There's a fire in your room."

With that he fled, his feet tripping over each other.

At ten o'clock, when he stole again into the snuggerly, all signs of her had disappeared.

At noon time he took her a tray which in silence he placed beside her bed. If she were awake, she gave no sign; sighing, he went away again.

After dark, when the dinner things had been cleared away, he ventured back, spurred on by torture such as he had never before endured. He approached her softly, reverently. She was not asleep, for he perceived with a spasm of pain that her hand went to her eyes at his approach.

"Last night I was crazy, I think, Patricia," he said. "Won't you look at me, please, dear? Won't you let me tell you how sorry I am?"

"I'm so glad, oh, so glad I didn't kill you," she quivered with a long gasp.

"How silly, to get such a notion into your head," he returned jerkily. "Darling, I know exactly what hurts you so, but I can help you if you'll forgive me. Won't

you forgive your boy this once. Could you just try? I'll be very kind. I swear I will! I'll never forget again how you feel toward me. Then together we can work out this horrid situation. It's possible, quite possible. We ought to face this thing just as it is." He went white and red as he spoke. "I was mad, Patricia, stark mad last night! Darling, can't you find it in your dear, kind heart to ease my mind a little?"

"I haven't any heart left, Stephen," she wailed. "It's gone somewhere away off.—Oh, I don't know what to do!"

She set her teeth upon her under lip to restrain its trembling.

"I was mad last night, too," she confessed. "Could you—could you let me go away—*now*, Stephen? Away by myself? I do wish to go so."

His whole frame shook in negation. Less now than yesterday!

"No! No! God, no!" he exclaimed. "Oh, my dear, sit up, or at least turn your face this way! Do let me talk to you sensibly. And you hear me, and be persuaded if you can. I wish more than I can say that I had listened to what you wanted to tell me last night. Will you let me wrap you in a blanket and carry you to the fire? Then you can tell me there."

"Not now," she refused, "not now!"

"We can't go on this way," he continued. "It isn't humanly possible to stay in the state of mind you're in, Patricia. Child, if not for my sake, then for your own, try to use your reason. We're married! Nothing can undo that! I thought once it could be done. I see now it can't. You'll change your mind about leaving me, and let me prove my love for you. Say you will!"

Without removing her hand from her eyes, she said:

"No! Perhaps, I should try and kill you again."

Her statement filled the man with singular, inward fury.

She was acting again. She was a *poseur*, persistent in her tomfoolery.

All the masculine, subduing instincts arose again within him and clamored against her edict of unhappiness for them both. Yet, how could he determine which way to turn or what to do with a reticent woman who would neither show any common sense nor even look at him? He had bumped into a wall of stone, only to beat his head, already bruised and aching, against it.

"Would you like to go to California, Patricia?" he asked, determined to ignore her attitude, "or if not there, some other place?"

"With you?" she breathed.

"Certainly with me!" he responded. "Of course! I'm your husband. Your place is with me; mine is with you."

"Will you take me to New York?" There was hope in her voice as she put the question.

Ossining was near New York. That thought went over Claypoole like a douche of cold water. His lips became straight, hard lines.

"Anywhere but there," he said. "If we went to New York, you'd leave me. I won't run the risk. I can't run the risk—to-day. Your idea is to leave me, isn't it?"

She neither affirmed nor negated his question; nor did she turn her head on the pillow.

"I'm perfectly willing to leave Montana, if you like," he proceeded after a while. "But I love you too well to let you go back to New York."

Once more he waited for her reply. It became evident that she did not intend to make any, so he said in warmer tones:

"Then I'll telephone for a drawing-room to Los Angeles. Would you like to stop off at Salt Lake, Patricia dear?"

"If you would," she acquiesced meekly.

An afterthought forced him to add:

"I'll take you to any spot on earth—save—New York. Patricia, isn't there anything under heaven I can do to make you happy?"

"I wish I could go away—alone," was all she said.

Again intense anger shook him. He strode to the door as if to escape the temptation to say words for which he would be sorry afterwards.

"Then it's settled that we'll go away immediately," he said in stifled tones, "but—but I do want to please you. I'll take you east if you'll promise to live with me. Will you, Patricia? Will you give me your word on that?"

"No, Stephen," drifted to him faintly.

The moment the door closed behind him, she sat straight up in bed. She could not go to Salt Lake—Los Angeles—or any other place with her husband. That was firmly established in her mind. She was beginning to reason somewhat. She had married Patrick O'Kelleron. The very name had flung the Pater into her vision in Idaho. She did not make any effort to figure out the mystery of his identification with Stephen. Last night she had thought to kill Patrick O'Kelleron in her sleep. She shuddered back to the pillow and covered her head. She had sense enough to realize, if she had done that, she would have killed the person she loved best on earth,—Stephen. To save him from her hate against Patrick O'Kelleron, she must never see him again.

She scrambled out of bed, electrified by the sudden decision that she would run away from the "Eagle's Nest" that night. She would go now! Now! At any minute she might repeat the attempt of last night with disastrous results. She slipped to the floor, her strength gone, her heart storming against the picture that gripped her.

Prostrate there, she recalled that something had awak-

ened her the night before in the snugger. Her arm was uplifted for the blow, too. Again the dream floated through her memory. All its hideous details moved on from start to finish until once more she stood with that upraised knife to make Patrick O'Kelleron pay his debt to the Pater.

Then she had seen Stephen's figure on the divan. That sight had toppled her over,—that and the consciousness that she had come to kill him.

Then, indeed, for agonizing moments, was she caught and held by panic. Stephen's dear life would have paid Patrick O'Kelleron's debt!

With an effort she got to her feet, almost in convulsions. She paused to recollect where she had put the knife when she had returned from the snugger. Under the scarf on the dressing table! She wanted to get her hands on it so badly that she lost one of her knitted slippers in her flight over the rug.

Shudderingly she lifted the knife as if she loathed its touch. Then she noiselessly opened the window and flung it far out into the snow-covered, mountain shrub.

Standing in her nightrobe, she essayed to plan her movements. First, she had the forethought to creep to the door and turn the key.

Then in trembling silence she began to dress. She must hide away somewhere! She knew no other way to save her husband, no other way to protect him from her hatred of Patrick O'Kelleron. The money she had was Stephen's. It took some time for her judgment to argue her into stowing it away on her person. Into her week-end bag she packed the few necessary things that lay on her dressing table. Working swiftly, she gave only fitful attention to what she was doing. Mentally she was traveling the road that led from the "Eagle's Nest" to the city of Butte.

Then through the open window she dropped her bag to the ground and crawled over the sill. Like a man in a dream, she gazed back into the house where she had met life's greatest experiences. She was leaving it forever.

What fetched a wistful, suppressed sob and a surge of love for Stephen was an order that she heard him give the Mongolian:

"We'll leave for Salt Lake to-morrow night, Ming. Begin packing in the morning. Mrs. Claypocle is ill, so go about it with as little fuss as possible."

When he ceased speaking, she plunged through the snow to the road, where she stood an instant, dazedly seeking her bearings.

Any nervousness as to what might happen to herself on that hazardous journey was overcome by her determination to catch the late train east. Even the overpowering mountains that zigzagged their bulk in hazy lines along the horizon made no impression upon her. She remembered that her love for Stephen was driving her away. Finally she turned from the "Eagle's Nest" to Butte, off there where hundreds of lights shone out like a swarm of winking fireflies.

CHAPTER XXXI

ABOUT the time that her love for her husband, Stephen Claypoole, had decided Patricia to flee from her husband, Patrick O'Kelleron, a tall young man stood at the station entrance in Butte and ran his eye over a line of taxis and omnibuses. Hotel Thornton was his destination; so he clambered into a conveyance that bore the name of that hostelry, placed his baggage on the floor and sat down.

A baffled, unsatisfied passion had driven Edward Blake from the Atlantic to the Pacific in search of Patricia Pepperday.

"It's far sweeter to love a little than to be adored much," an ancient lover once sighed. To this Edward agreed without analysis. Against the background of Flossie's tearful submission and worshipful yielding, Patricia's haughty, gray eyes had proven irresistibly alluring.

At the time when one calamity after another had descended on the Pepperdays, Blake's colossal conceit had argued that she would appeal to him. This conclusion had induced him to remain aloofly silent, but amazement and consternation at her sudden departure from New York had sent him headlong in pursuit of her address, and he considered himself a clever strategist in that he had inveigled Fancy Cavendish into displaying her picture postal cards which she had received from Miss Pepperday. The recent ones were postmarked, "Butte, Mont."

Before leaving New York he had arranged with his law partner to approach Flossie about a divorce, and he felt certain that the substantial sum he was willing to settle upon her would be a temptation she could not with-

stand. All women were attracted toward an independent income, and, of course, Flossie was not an exception to the rule. He smiled inwardly as he remembered how thoroughly he had cut himself off from his associates in New York. A trip for his health which would last until he was needed at election; yes, he might be home in less time; indeed, he had not lost his ambitions to hold a judgeship, had been his answers to impertinent questions. But he had forborne expressing aloud that his future depended on two women, Patricia and his wife.

As the 'bus rattled up the hill, he muttered a comment about Martin Brewer which was bald in its emphasis. He wondered what tack he would be forced to take if Brewer had acquainted Patricia with the existence of a Mrs. Edward Blake. Ah, such meddlesome old Betties, inoculated with moral philanthropy, were a menace to every young man of the better class in New York!

On this momentous journey toward the setting sun and toward love in the highest sense of the word, Blake was traveling incognito. He was unwilling that his name and fame should hamper his appeal to Patricia. Even though she had tattered his high pride to ribbons by disdain and contempt, he still had enough conceit to buoy him up in the belief that once she looked upon him in this land of snow and ice—Bah! That for pussyfoot Brewer! As he swung into the hotel, he snapped his mental fingers straight into Martin's face.

"Thomas Black, Chicago, Ill.," was still ink-moist from the flourish of his fountain pen when he left the desk to be directed to his room.

Until after ten o'clock he sat in the hotel lobby, smoking. He regretted the last several long pulls at the bottle in his traveling case as he remembered Patricia's withering scorn at Balmville, but he contented himself with the thought that from now on he would let whiskey alone.

A good-natured individual, whom he had noticed at dinner with a pretty girl, took an empty chair on his right. It was evident to Edward that he was a well-known citizen for he bowed frequently and often greeted a passer-by with a chummy "Howdy."

Enviously Blake watched him play with a large cigar. No man could so enjoy himself and have one big care, and the sigh that followed that decision seemed to come from the region of the alderman's boots. Freedom from open and secret worries was not listed among his joys.

Conscious of his neighbor's proximity and steady stare, the Butte man turned his head.

"Nice night," he remarked pleasantly with the *camaraderie* of the West.

"Too cold to suit me," responded Blake, glad of speech.

Poising his cigar in mid-air, the stranger said:

"Oh, the weather's fine now, compared to what it has been. I'm Alf Carraby, sir, an old resident here.—Some folks don't like livin' up here in this high altitude, but to my mind Butte's the only city on the globe."

"You have the same idea about your town that most people have about theirs," laughed Blake. "Now, I don't care to live west of Chicago myself. But it's a matter of growing fond of a place, I imagine."

Without hesitation Carraby agreed.

"Of course, that's so! It's generally where bread grows well buttered that a fellow likes it. Know anybody in Butte?"

Out of Blake's desire to locate Patricia before he slept sprang a quick decision.

"Yes, I have one friend here," he acknowledged. "At least, I imagine so," and then he checked himself with a short ejaculation which went unnoticed by the other man.

A small black bag in her hand, Patricia Pepperday was passing through the hotel corridor. Edward had painted

many mind pictures about his first glimpse of her but never one like this.

"See that kid goin' along there?" Carraby broke in on his shocked surprise. "That pretty, little, dark one just speakin' to the clerk? Well, she can act, that girl can!"

By sheer will power Blake glued his big body to the chair. His judgment reasoned that this was not the propitious moment to approach her. Yet, as she disappeared into the elevator, he set his teeth to prevent himself from calling out her name.

"Who is she?" he queried, with effort holding his voice steady.

"Patricia Rushmore, and as sweet a chicken as ever acted before my footlights," answered Carraby loquaciously. "She was my star just long enough to establish herself as a favorite here in Butte and then gave in her notice. I had an up-and-down fight with her, but it didn't do any good. I can't say she left me high and dry, for her understudy is a cute kid. Her name's Ruth Howland, and she's a peach of a girl.

"I'm not sayin' a word against her or her acting, mind you, but the trouble is, I'm goin' to marry 'er, and, of course, I can't get her best work. I said 'Damn' to her the other day, and she gave me a call you could have heard to the coast. But, Lord, she's so sweet, is that Ruth, that I don't much care what she does say to me.

"But it's different with Rushmore. She's an almighty hard worker, and I'm comin' to call on 'er to-morrow and see if I can make a dicker with 'er. She is sure some good little actress!"

"Did she join another company?" inquired Blake.

"No, she wouldn't do that! She got to playin' around with an author—"

"So you have authors out here, too," was the curt interruption.

"Yes, a sort of one," nodded the manager. "Fellow by name of Stephen Claypoole, and he scribbles damned good stuff, or at least the parts I've read were. But Rushmore's like most other actresses! She fell for the first good-lookin' duck that came quacking along. Say, didn't she look as if some one had dragged her through an inch knothole? But, maybe, her experiences with Claypoole won't hurt 'er any for the stage."

"Claypoole?" echoed Blake with assumed indifference. "Claypoole? I never heard of him."

"Perhaps, not! But you will if he keeps on with his work. He's a picturesque fellow, that Stephen, but I wish to God I'd never introduced 'im to Miss Rushmore."

"A picturesque fellow!" Edward Blake found himself endeavoring to visualize the personality of the man who had stamped that expression of suffering on Patricia Pepperday's face. His ever-ready hate sprang out at the stranger with murderous intent.

"Where does he live?" dropped from his lips.

"That depends," Carraby told him. "While he was courtin' Rushmore, he stuck to Butte closer than a poor relation. But he has a place off in the hills west of Butte, three or four miles beyond Galena Gulch. I went out with him once, and it's amazin' how much stuff he's lugged up there to make it comfortable. 'Eagle's Nest,' he calls it.—Nice place to take a girl to, I don't think! It's God-forsaken, and, Great Jehoshaphat, as lonely as I'd be in heaven with a harp. I wonder if Claypoole did coax that kid up there! He always struck me as the soul of honor. But you can't tell by the looks of a toad how far he'll leap. Why, you're not going to hit the feathers so soon! The night's young yet."

"I think I'll go write some letters," returned Blake, "and then I'll turn in. Thanks for a pleasant half-hour, Carraby."

Racked with bitter meditations and unable to sleep, Stephen Claypoole lived through his last night at the "Eagle's Nest."

Three of the hours of the day that would find him no longer in Montana had passed. As the clock struck, he arose and prowled out into the living room. There he stood with his ear against Patricia's door. All was quiet within. He hoped passionately that the poor child was asleep. He went to the grate, where a smoldering log rested on the andirons. Ming had banked the fire for the night. Tired to his bones with self-condemnation, he leaned against the mantel. He would be glad to get away from Montana. The house he had grown to love because of its solitude was now repulsive. It always would be repulsive—after last night.

Then a sound from the outside brought him suddenly erect. It was foreign to the mountain noises, suspiciously like a human being. But no one ever came to the "Eagle's Nest" at this time of night, not even the Chinamen who now and then visited Ming. Yet, he was sure he had heard footsteps.

On his way toward the door there came a rap upon it, a smartly incisive rap that did not accord with the diffident nature of the Mongolians. He unlocked the door and threw it open.

"Hello," he called, "who's there?"

"Me," answered a voice, and Edward Blake loomed forth out of the night.

Claypoole was the first to recover himself from the shock of the meeting. However, he made no pretense of welcome, but the other, insensible to any discourtesy, crossed the threshold at one stride.

"For the love of God, Blake, where'd you come from!" exclaimed Stephen.

His facial muscles working like threads, Edward Blake

closed the door. Coming unexpectedly upon Patrick O'Kelleron instead of the man he sought aggravated his already inflamed temper.

"Where's Stephen Claypoole?" scraped from his throat.

"Here," retorted Stephen, stiffening. "What do you want of me?"

Austere accusation drew Blake's body to its fullest height. His blazing eyes indicted his host a liar.

"You're Patrick O'Kelleron," he responded trenchantly.

"I'm Stephen Claypoole, also," was the icy answer.

Ire was rising by the minute in Claypoole's breast. He had never cared for Alderman Blake, even when their profession and club life had brought them together in New York. Now he resented his intrusion and belligerent attitude with haughtiness.

"I say it again," he asserted, "I am Stephen Claypoole."

For the fact to seep through Blake's fuddled brain took a full half-minute. At first he was impressed with the idea that O'Kelleron was shielding Claypoole for some reason or other. But, groggy as he was, he remembered Patrick's reputation in New York for veracity, and, as he stared into the scintillant brown eyes and took note of the mighty man with his red head thrown back imperiously, he realized like a flash, that he had heard the truth.

"Then—then, if you are, what did you do to—to Patricia Pepperday?" he rasped.

Astonishment wiped the critical frown from Claypoole's brow.

"I haven't the slightest acquaintance with the young lady," he replied promptly. "To my knowledge I've never seen her."

"You lie!" burst from Blake, bitterly vehement.

Stephen's fists clenched, but almost immediately they

relaxed. His sane mind was conscious that he was dealing with a man, crazed by alcohol. That being so, he would not attack him, if it could be avoided.

"I rather think, Blake, that you've quite lost control of yourself," he announced coldly. "I'd advise you not to repeat what you just said. I've told you I don't know Miss Pepperday—if you mean Michael Pepperday's sister."

"Yes! She's just the one—I—do mean," said Blake disjointedly. "Mike Pepperday's sister, Patricia Pepperday! If you're Claypoole, I tell you again you lie when you say you don't know her. I saw her in Butte but a few hours ago, and a man told me—"

With the velocity of light hideous thoughts swept across Stephen. Sweat ran from every pore in his body. Then he banished the ugly suggestion. His Patricia was not in Butte. The picture of her dear face shrouded by dark curls, quieted him a little. She was asleep, asleep in her own bed and should not be aroused. Advancing a step, he flung out a hand toward a chair.

"Sit down, Ed," he urged in a low voice, "and please don't be quite so noisy."

"I don't want to sit down," muttered Blake.

The frown came back to Claypoole's brow, even more pronounced.

"Stand, then! It makes no difference to me," he rejoined, "but you must listen quietly to what I'm going to say. I can't help what a man told you in Butte. I don't know Miss Pepperday. I've never known but one Patricia, and she was Patricia Rushmore."

With difficulty Blake followed the statement through. After his long walk in the biting wind, the heat of the room was nauseating, and he found it hard to keep his equilibrium. But Stephen's voice had softened on uttering his wife's name, and for an instant the speaking of it

seemed to make no impression on his listener. Then an oath slithered through his teeth.

"Patricia Rushmore! Patricia Rushmore is Patricia Pepperday! She's Michael Pepperday's sister!—You damned devil, you weren't satisfied in hounding her brother to prison, but you had to ruin her! I tell you, when I saw her in Butte to-night, she was almost dead."

Like a twelve-inch shell out of a peaceful sky, the explanation of the past few weeks crashed through Patrick O'Kelleron's brain. His drivelling accuser faded from his sight. That day in Idaho Falls, when he had told her that he was Patrick O'Kelleron! His accursed conceit—his stupidity! Blake was still howling at him. He heard curses but gave them no heed.

He strode to Patricia's chamber and pounded on the door with his fists. He grasped the knob and twisted it and, discovering that the door was locked, rattled it violently. All the time he was entreating her to let him in without delay. He spoke Michael's name with strong persuasion. But nothing save the moaning of the mountain wind came to his ear when he placed it to the keyhole.

Straightening up, his great muscles knotted for a spring. His shoulder crashed against the door panels with such force that the lock broke completely off and fell to the floor.

When he stumbled headlong into the room, Edward Blake leaped after him. A violent gale blew past them, bellying the lace curtains back from the open window. The momentum of his speed landed Stephen within a few feet of the bed. He stared at it and brushed his hands across his eyes as if he doubted them.

She was gone! She *was* gone!

"Patricia," he stammered. "She's left me! Patricia—my wife—" He hesitated, gazing at Blake as if he were

a stranger. Then, "Get out of my way," he cried. "I'm going to Butte after my wife."

Somewhat sobered by the electrifying turn of events, Blake stared ominously at the man staggering toward him.

"Just stand where you are, O'Kelleron," he ejaculated. "You've finished with the Pepperdays, damn you! Take that!"

The report of a revolver spat through the room, and Stephen Claypoole went down like an ox hit by a sledge hammer.

The conquest of his enemy had been so easy that Edward Blake tottered forward on his toes, only to recoil on to his heels, his head reeling. Then, gripping his revolver, he took several steps backward in the direction of the door. Now, he would go. He could not get away quickly enough. He had come to kill Stephen Claypoole, and he had done it! He had killed Patricia's husband, too. Thank God for that!

At the threshold he swung around dizzily. This action brought him face to face with another obstacle. There in his path stood Ming, like an ill-omened bird, his eyes glittering dark between narrowed lids. The Asiatic and the American glared at each other for the fractional part of a minute. Then the Chinaman's head shot out, and his mouth spread wide in a snarl. There came to Blake the withering thought that a witness to his crime existed, a threatening witness, who seemed ready to jump upon him like a wiry animal. Convulsive shudders ran through him. In sequence the horrors that follow on the trail of homicide passed through his mind. His intelligence was not so far befogged in drink that he did not remember the relentless qualities of the law. That the State was no respecter of persons spiked him through like a spear. He could hear Ming's feet making a per-

ceptible tip-tap on the floor as he lifted first one and then the other. He saw the fellow's thin lips moving but heard no sound.

"Devil man," finally burst from Ming's throat.

The sound of the hoarse croak lent strength to Blake's sense of self-protection.

With a slow, deadly gesture he raised his arm and in quick succession worked the trigger of his gun.

For an infinitesimal space of time it seemed to him that the heavens had been rent asunder and were vomiting down their burning fury. Of a sudden something leaped upon him, and his wits were gone.

CHAPTER XXXII

MOST of the citizens of Butte were asleep when the night train snorted out of the Butte station to continue its journey east. Indifferent to what was going on around her, Patricia followed the porter to her compartment, and for a long time after getting into her berth, she stared, wide-eyed, into the darkness. At last she fell into a deep sleep, oblivious to the world and its necessities.

Not until she reached St. Paul, did she arouse herself enough to consider her serious situation. The days and nights which had elapsed since she had left Montana received hardly intelligent attention. They seemed but a blank period of time, checkered, here and there, with spaces of consciousness, during which she partook of the food that was offered by kindly train attendants.

With the returning of bodily strength she was tormented by unanswerable questions which, like sentient voices, repeated themselves many times over. What had Stephen done when he had found her gone? Was he glad to be rid of her? Would he soon forget her? As this last query ran through her mind forebodingly and would not be banished, she wept into her pillow. Long, lonely, withered years stretched out before her like an untrodden road, ambushed with seraphic memories that would only make the blind trail the more difficult to tread. Patrick O'Kelleron had been the crafty builder of an artful barrier between herself and her husband.

Then, again and again, she ploughed through the dreadful dream in which she had nearly used her slender-bladed knife in retribution. Oh, that hateful sleep that had betrayed her into the snuggery.

The train was speeding through the environs of Chicago, prior to her first change of cars. At that, she had nearly fifteen minutes of the journey to go when at length, coated and hatted, she dropped into a seat to wait.

The door of her compartment was slightly ajar, and, without asking permission, a blue-capped boy poked his head inside.

"What paper, lady? What paper?" he squawked.

Aimlessly she took from her pocketbook a few cents, but not because she wished to scan the news items. It was simpler to buy than refuse to purchase. After the youth had vanished with his wares, the newspaper lay on her lap, unheeded, for some time.

By chance her restless eyes caught the name, "O'Kelleron," staring up from a black headline, occupying conspicuously a large space at the top of the paper.

Her lips shaped "O'Kelleron," but not her voice. That detestable word was too familiar, too much a part of her present agony, to be passed over by a mere glance.

Then she read, "Patrick O'Kelleron, a New York lawyer, killed in the Rocky Mountains!"

Stiffening rigidly, she read it again as she muttered aloud with rising incredulity, "Killed—in the Rocky mountains!"

So used was she to attesting, "Stephen is Patrick O'Kelleron," that she spoke the phrase almost as if it were a formula.

"Stephen is my husband, my beloved." Then she added, "If Patrick O'Kelleron is dead—"

The meaning of the words almost struck her dumb. Why, that word was *not* killed! It could not be! Such a calamity was not to be considered. It had been her hatred for Patrick O'Kelleron that had made her mis-read. She did not look again at the paper, as she told herself that the sentence must have been, "Patrick

O'Kelleron, a New York lawyer, *lived* in the Rocky Mountains!" Ah, then his newspaper friends had located him at last, for, of course, it was impossible that such a man could remain incognito forever. This thought loosened her taut muscles a little. Stephen was alive in the "Eagle's Nest." Perhaps, her flight had decided him to assume his rightful name. She dared a glance at the paper.

"K-I-L-L-E-D," she spelled.

It was "killed!" Not—not "lived!"

Then a massive red head, a countenance beautiful in feature and gracious sympathy, rendered illegible the *Chicago Journal*. Her eyes closed in a spasm of trembling. And even through her closed lids she saw Stephen's smiling brown gaze and behind his lips his even white teeth.

"Stephen is Patrick O'Kelleron," she said, and with that she toppled forward, senseless.

"This ain't Patrick nor Stephen, neither," a voice filtered through to her senses, a few minutes later. "I's George Washington, the porter. Gee! But you was sure some sick, ma'am!"

It might have been thirty minutes later—perhaps more, perhaps less—that Patricia stood alone in a room in the Auditorium Annex, nor did she move for a long time after the bellboy had closed the door.

One trembling hand went to her brow and brushed back the curls, still damp, from her white face.

"My Stephen, my husband, is alive in Butte," her blue lips spoke aloud. "My husband is *not* dead."

Then she sat down on the floor and opened her bag. Taking out the newspaper which had been thrust untidily in on top, she spread it out on her lap.

"Patrick O'Kelleron, a New York lawyer, killed in the Rocky Mountains!" she read.

"A strange explosion occurred west of Butte early Friday morning, and Patrick O'Kelleron was killed. A Chinese domestic was also killed in the same accident. It was learned from Mr. O'Kelleron's banker that, under the *nom-de-plume* of 'Stephen Claypoole,' he had been spending some time in Butte, studying locality with an eye to writing a north-western story."

The paper crackled in Patricia's fingers.

"This—is—a lie," she said with mechanical precision. But even as her lips spoke, her reason shouted that Stephen was dead. In fascinated horror she managed to decipher the rest of the article.

"The real facts of the tragedy have been cleared up somewhat. A reporter from a Butte newspaper discovered that the servant who had charge of Mr. O'Kelleron's home had been in the habit of purchasing dynamite for his mining countrymen. Experts found quantities of the explosive near the spot where the house had stood.

"The young attorney was unmarried and possessed great wealth. His body was burned beyond recognition, but his enormous stature established his identity beyond doubt. His remains will be shipped home immediately to his mother, Mrs. Alexander Clark of New York City."

As quiet as if all sense of life had been suspended, Patricia stared dazedly ahead, but her eyes might have been bandaged for aught she saw. To the room she was in and its four walls she was oblivious. She was stunned to blindness, to deafness, her mind groping for the facts that had struck from her the power to think. It might have been seconds or even minutes that she sat with that herald of death in her lap.

At length four words fell from her lips.

"My—husband *is* dead!"

The sound of her own voice, uttering a sentence so full

of dire meaning, sent her cringing back. All of her own unspeakable thoughts against Patrick O'Kelleron wrapped her again in blankets of ice.

The period that followed was not to be compared to any past time in all her life. Other suffering sank into insignificance, contrasted with the exquisite agony of this.

After hours and hours had passed during which she relived in fiery self-accusation the short weeks since she had been married to Stephen Claypoole, she dragged herself up, only to pace the room back and forth. The night life of Chicago dissolved into intermittent sounds, and still she walked, memories, double-edged, propping her eyes so widely open that it seemed she had no lids at all to cover her aching pupils.

The winter dawn had lost its youth in a gray day when, completely exhausted, she began to undress. While unpacking her bag, she came across a sealed envelope. She had never seen it before. Turning it over to the inscription side, she saw written in Stephen's large, bold handwriting:

"Patrick Claypoole O'Kelleron
Last Will and Testament
Marriage Certificate."

A nausea came with the knowledge that Stephen had secreted his will among her possessions and that, when he had made it, he was thinking of the time after his death. She dropped the envelope as if it had burned her fingers. Nothing material mattered now!

For almost two weeks she stayed alone, far above the busy streets, seemingly dead to any initiative, eating irregularly, and sleeping only when she could not keep awake.

The sharp sense of utter desolation gradually subsided into a kind of dull apathy. Spasmodically she endeav-

ored to stir the dying embers of hate and find satisfaction in the thought that, at least, Patrick O'Kelleron had paid his debt to the Pater, but every such effort succeeded merely in exposing more mercilessly how cruel had been her conduct in Montana.

Not in self-justification, did she reiterate:

"I was sick—crazy—out there at the 'Eagle's Nest,' and I blamed it on the Pater, my beautiful father, who only wished happiness to every one in the world. Oh, I never once tried to think of anything but how I hated Patrick! But in my heart I didn't—I didn't!"

The keen edge of the pain she endured cut away the husk of selfishness. Martin Brewer's words came to her, "Don't do it, sweet, don't do it! Hating another fellow only brings bad to yourself."

By degrees, so minute she was hardly aware any change was taking place, sorrow performed its sweet and salutary office by cleansing her heart of her hatred of Patrick O'Kelleron. Little by little she dared to crawl out of the purgatory which she judged herself only fit to inhabit.

Ultimately she realized that love had conquered her demoniacal spirit. Tears of thanksgiving wiped away that tenacious thought that Patrick O'Kelleron had any debt to pay the dead Pater. That triad of men, built into her imagination through her own wicked desires, split asunder and left Patrick a compelling, undying reality in her mind, as he had been in Blackberry Lane, as he had been in Butte before their marriage. It was in that moment that the two entities that had once possessed her, the one for good, the other for evil, were transformed into her giant, idolized husband, complete from his red hair to the soles of his feet.

And thus her destroying hatred fell from her like a worm-eaten garment.

Not long after Michael came into her mind as

a vital reality, and blind Yum-yum and Barney took their places in her thoughts. She had to live for the home folks. The youth in her spoke with insistence. She must live! Stephen, her husband, her beloved, was gone! She would have bartered her eternal salvation to bring him back if it had been possible; but he was dead.

So closed that chapter of Patricia's life; and she buried its hallowed and unhallowed pages deep within her soul.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"BRIDGEPORT, CONN., *Sunday*.

"*Dear Mr. Brewer,*" began a letter which Martin opened one morning.

"My small son is now two weeks old, and for me to say that he is beautiful sounds conceited, I know. But everybody who has seen him says he is very remarkable for a child so young. Mother loves him dearly, but I'm sure that isn't the reason she thinks he is so smart. I wish you could see her rocking him now. She looks like an angel. She is one, too. You remember what you said about mothers? I always think of it when she's tending baby.

"This letter has a threefold mission, dear Mr. Brewer. First, to thank you again for what you did for me; next, to ask you if you know where Mr. Blake is. He never writes me, although the money comes regularly from his banker, but I'd like him to know about the baby. If you see him, please tell him.

"I thought at first I would call my little boy, 'Edward,' but I've changed my mind. May I name him after you?

"Cordially and gratefully yours,

FLOSSIE BAKER BLAKE.

"P. S. I meant to tell you that the baby's gums are quite swollen. Mother says he might be getting a tooth. I wouldn't consider it possible, if he weren't so unusual in every way. I think 'Martin Brewer Blake' a lovely name for him, don't you?

"FLOSSIE."

Martin's spirits were uplifted for a moment by a hearty laugh at this effusion. Flossie was a typical mother, bless her heart. How often he had heard the same old story, the wonders of a new-born babe. Well, he loved to hear it; if he did not, there was something wrong with the mother.

After assuring himself that he was effectually rid of William Foster, Martin had resumed his writing with his usual facility. Although he had received several humble, apologetic letters from that young man, each one begging for another chance, he gave them no heed whatever, save to stow them away in his safe.

Patrick O'Kelleron's premature death had shocked him, and he had been sorely touched at the young lawyer's funeral by Nancy's pitiful grief. In personal sorrow for his dead friend he had come away from the O'Kelleron vault with a keen sense of the frailty of life.

Always active, his anxiety about Benny had lately become acute. Doctor Percy Blair had decided that the boy was strong enough to undergo an operation, but Benny stubbornly refused to hear of it while Patricia was absent from New York.

A deeper sadness fell across Martin's countenance.

In his mail that morning he had received a note from Patricia, dated at Chicago. She was coming back to the city, but she had not stated the day of her arrival. For some time he sat thinking. Once the prospect of seeing her would have thrilled him with delight, but now he turned to the memory of Adelina Pepperday with a longing closely akin to pain. He had heard about her frequently from Benny who often visited at Balmville. So fearful had he been of himself, however, that he had not ventured into her presence. His harrowed soul had prophesied that, if he did, one of two things would happen. Either he would burst out that Michael was innocent, or he

would instantly ask her to marry him, and it was farthest from his sense of decency to ask a woman to share a name which in the fall would in all probability be stained with crime.

Then with the promptitude that was always his upon making a decision, he put on his hat and coat and went out. At a nearby telegraph office he wrote and sent this message to Flossie Blake:

"Congratulations on the boy! God love him! God bless him! God save him! Eddie is out of town, and no one in his office knows his whereabouts, but I left your message with his secretary. Name the youngster, 'Patrick O'Kelleron Blake.' Here's hoping he will grow up to be as good a man as he is named after. Then you will have a great reason to be a happy mother.

"MARTIN BREWER."

Blue devils, bluer and more devilish than ordinary, were in possession of Benny Brewer upon his father's arrival at the studio. He was nursing his old grievance. If he could not have Patricia Pepperday, he refused to be happy himself, or let any one be happy around him.

"Hello, Ben! How are you, old man?" was Martin's greeting, as he threw aside his hat and sat down.

"Hello, Fan," squawked George from his perch on the boy's shoulder. "Is breakfast ready, Ma?"

"I feel rotten," muttered Benny, shoving the parrot away impatiently. "I hate being by myself all the time. Fancy Cavendish promised she'd be here early, and she hasn't even telephoned. I'd rather have her than be alone. But nobody keeps a promise to me, somehow."

"Aw, Ben," shrieked the parrot. "George's a damned pretty boy." Then he settled on the arm of Martin's chair and went to sleep.

Martin disregarded his son's complaint. His sympathies had run deeper of late for his afflicted child, and he was not inclined to chide him for his pessimism.

"I had a letter from Paddy Pepperday this morning, Ben," he announced after a short silence. "I ran up to tell you about it."

"Let me see it," interjected Benny. "I haven't had a word from her in weeks. I was thinking of her when you came in."

After a fruitless search in his pockets, Martin shook his head.

"I must have left it in the office," he explained, "but I can tell you what's in it. She's coming to New York! I imagine, very soon."

"Glory!" cried Benny. "Now, I'm glad you came up, dad, and honestly I don't mean to be so grouchy and horrid all the time." He bent forward eagerly. "What did Lady Pat say?"

To be the bearer of unpleasant news to any one was especially repugnant to Martin; much more difficult it was, though, when that person happened to be his son.

"You mustn't be shocked at what I'm going to tell you," he began presently. "But the fact is, that Patricia married Patrick O'Kelleron out west somewhere."

Doubt was in Benny's eyes, and one set of fingers went to his brow and traveled across it.

"I don't believe it," he said deliberately. "Why, she detested O'Kelleron so she couldn't stand to hear his name. One day while I was in Balmville when she was getting well, I spoke of him, and she nearly had a fit. She said he ought to be electrocuted. I tell you she downright hated him."

Succeeded a short pause. Then Brewer agreed:

"I know she did, poor girl! She insisted, in spite of everything I could say, that Pat was unjust at Michael's

trial, and that he was personally responsible for her father's death."

Benny made an impatient gesture with his hand.

"Never mind that," he protested, "what else was in her letter?"

"Nothing much!"

A painful silence fell.

"But O'Kelleron's dead, even if she did marry him," Benny observed finally in a low voice. "He is dead,—isn't he? You're sure of that?"

"Yes, certainly! And I don't know the particulars of her marriage, only the bare fact. Her letter was rather incoherent, and I gathered she has been ill. However, we'll soon find out, I suppose."

He watched his son as he talked. He would have given half his fortune to know what was going on behind those glowing eyes.

"She's a widow then," Benny ejaculated, his cheeks flaming. "It seems strange, dad, to think of Paddy being anybody's widow but mine. Somehow, I don't believe it."

Martin's heart yearned to comfort him. Recently he had felt as if Benny had barricaded himself behind an impenetrable hedge. To-day he had come to root it up if possible. He was willing to do anything to obtain the boy's confidence. He knew, without being told, that much of his broken spirit came from grieving over Patricia. He had expected a tirade of abuse and tears at his remarkable announcement, but nothing of the kind came! Benny was sitting in quiet cogitation, looking at the floor. After a time, he raised his head.

"Lots of fellows marry widows, dad," he exclaimed. "And you said I could have her. You did say so, and you can't break your promise to me.—You wouldn't! You never do!—I don't care if she has been married; I

want her. If you'll do what you said, then I'll let Doctor Blair come. You've got to get her to like me! Oh, you've got to!"

He sent forth the words much as if he were suing for something that money could buy.

This demand Martin had foreseen, but he had not the slightest idea how to meet it. It was true he had made that promise in the heat of excitement. Perhaps, he had counted more on his influence over Patricia than he had had any right to do. Yet, as Benny had said, she was a widow now. She had had her fling, so to speak, and she had consistently assured him that she liked Benny—that she pitied him. "Pity is akin to love!" He quoted the old adage to himself and wondered whether Patricia would not grow to be fond of his son if she stood by him in his climb to health.

However, he would have more heart to hope if he were sure of one thing: Had Benny killed Fatty Funny Breeches? Was the soul that conceived beautiful harmonies stained with a fellow mortal's death? He had to know!

"Ask him! Ask him! Make him tell you!" kept up a mental fire against his paternal faith.

As of yore he cast aside the impulse.

"But it's this way, kid! We don't know but Patricia was all-fired fond of Patrick, and she may be badly broken up over his death, which would be but natural. Her letter plainly stated that no one knew she had married him, not even Patrick's mother. I imagine that's a fact, too, because there wasn't a hint published about it. Before I can say much to you or do anything, I must wait until she gets here. You can see that, Ben! Can't you?"

"Yes, of course, I can," came in agreement. "But I've waited so long already."

"Well, if you'll take my advice, child," Martin insisted almost sternly, "you'll wait still longer. Your grandmother used to say, 'Roses grow in the mouth of patience!' and it's the Lord's truth! If I were you, I wouldn't be wiggling her about marriage until—until—Doctor Blair—"

"I won't be operated on till Lady Pat's my wife," interrupted Benny. "I'm afraid I wouldn't get well." A shudder ran over him. "Paddy will teach me her religion. She's sweet and doesn't lecture a fellow. While she didn't promise to marry me, she will, I feel sure—if you keep at her about it."

Leaning over, Brewer studied the frowning young face.

"Her letter did say that one of her future tasks would be to dig up new evidence to free her brother, Michael." He spoke every word with distinctness. "She'll undoubtedly ask me to help her. Is—is there any reason, Ben, why I shouldn't?"

There! To answer that question, even if he persisted in his refusal to tell what happened at Cavendish's that night, Benny would have to let the cat out of the bag. Either Michael's conviction protected him, or it did not. It seemed to Martin as if he were hanging between life and death during that nettling silence. If his heart pumped any faster, the blood would burst through his pulses.

But self-centered Benny was not thinking of Michael Pepperday. He had but one object in view, and to that he clung with tenacity. He wanted Michael's sister for his wife, and he intended hectoring his father until his desire was granted.

"I'd rather you'd make her marry me," he replied, looking down at his twisting fingers. "She'll be glad when she sees what I've done for Fancy. The kid weighs pounds more than she did when Paddy went away, and

I've taught her a lot of things. I don't see what you can do for Mike, save to get a pardon, maybe. Sometimes it seems you're more interested in everybody else than you are in me."

Then swiftly he raised his dark eyes.

"Get Paddy to marry me before you start anything. It would make me horribly nervous with a mess of investigation going on. Wait till I'm well. Will you do that, dad?"

In his anxiety the father read into his son's words a meaning so dire that he jumped to the point of accusing him then and there of Arthur Brown's murder. But Benny suddenly sank into a helpless, sobbing heap, and the burning words died in Brewer's throat. He would have to wait a while longer. He had nothing to go on. Perhaps, when Benny was well! Good God, it had been nothing but a continuous "Perhaps" for months.

"Listen to me, son," he urged, putting his arms around the boy and lifting him up, "and remember what I'm going to tell you. Women are queer in their likes and dislikes; men, too, for that matter. You've got to buck up and give some cheer to Lady Pat when she gets home. It'll help you if you keep in mind that I can't take her by the scruff of the neck and make her marry you. You must realize that things aren't done that way nowadays; even if we wanted to, which we don't. But I say this much now! You shall see her as often as I can manage it, and, for heaven's sake, be tender and kind. Don't cry—don't fuss at her! If you want to rag any one, rag me. Recollect always that you can catch more flies with molasses than you can with vinegar."

CHAPTER XXXIV

ON its scheduled minute the Twentieth Century, Limited, glided into the Grand Central Station with Patricia among its passengers. As she walked through the big throng alone, a dreary weight of nostalgia oppressed her spirits. Several times she ran against strangers and had to pause to wipe away welling tears. So many people and not a single one interested in her!

Once she had pictured herself coming into this place, but clinging to Stephen's arm in happy reliance on his strength. How could she do anything without him? It seemed that every turn she took she must come upon him and, oh, to see his face in life as she often saw it in her dreams!

"Stephen is dead," her reason told her throbbing heart, "and you're still alive, and there's lots of work for you to do yet."

At the cab stand she gave the address of a small hotel on Forty-fourth Street. Then she climbed into the taxi and sank back, completely fagged.

She could count on her fingers the number of blocks that lay between her and Barney. He was at Cavenish's and by this time had received her telegram. She caught her breath and in a long sigh expelled it. Before she slept that night, she would have seen him and Mrs. Clark, too.

One of the first things she did, after settling herself in her room, was to search the telephone book for Alexander Clark's address.

"Mr. and Mrs. Clark are at O'Kelleron Island until next fall," the caretaker told her over the wire.

That meant she would be compelled to travel to Portchester that day. She remembered that Stephen had mentioned his summer home on the sound, but she could recall very little of his description.

According to the calendar, it was late in February, and the day was sour and cold, when she alighted from the train at Portchester, New York. A clammy mist, full of drizzle, enveloped everything in the wet obscurity of the late afternoon.

Now, that she was face to face with the meeting to which she had looked forward since she had left the windy city on the shores of Lake Michigan, she was prompted to return to New York without seeing Stephen's mother. A letter might be as effectual as a personal interview. To overcome this temptation, she bolted down a flight of steps to a line of waiting taxis.

During the drive towards the sound, she soothed her jumping nerves by affirming that, however Mrs. Clark received her, she was doing the one thing of which she knew Patrick O'Kelleron would approve."

"But I hope she will be kind," she told herself, as the taxi pulled up at the mainland end of a footbridge.

The tide was rising, and the slowly incoming water made little puddles among the piles that supported the bridge above the black mud of the tide flats. Three islands lay side by side, with small bridges from each to the longer one that led to the shore.

"Which is O'Kelleron Island?" she asked the driver.

"That one there, Miss!" The man pointed soundward with a stubby forefinger. "Shall I wait?"

"I think you'd better," she responded. "I can't tell now how long I'll be gone."

With bitter tears scalding her lids, she stood looking at Stephen's home. She could see the house behind the belt of trees, its roof reared far above the highest

branches. The chimneys, too, loomed out against the gray sky like squares of red calico. Retaining walls of solid masonry protected the island from the waves and presented a battlemented face to the outside world.

She moved forward and had almost set her foot upon the bridge when she noted a man crossing it in her direction. Suddenly she recognized in the tall, blond person, the man who had called several times for Millicent Foster. Clark! Stephen's stepfather! Never by the greatest stretch of imagination, had she connected Milly's admirer with Patrick O'Kelleron. Undecided, she lingered a moment, then she stepped back and waited among the several people loitering about the place until Mr. Clark had passed on to a large touring car.

"Drive into New York as quickly as possible—to the Hotel Astor!" Patricia heard him say to the chauffeur. Then he climbed into the automobile, and with its klaxon blaring, it mounted the hill and was gone.

On reaching the island, Patricia walked along the broad cement pavement to the house. It was a formidable place for a timid girl to enter on an errand like hers, and once more she was disposed to run away as fast as ever her legs could carry her. However, she resisted the inclination and rang the bell. The length of time she waited on the broad piazza she did not particularly notice. The steady tick-tock of the falling water drops only deepened her melancholy.

Through the trees, bared by the winter winds, she saw the vast expanse of Long Island Sound. It was an impressively dismal scene. The clouds had lifted somewhat, and a rising breeze was dissipating the mists. Only here and there straggling streamers of fog clung to the sheltered nooks and coves.

After a while a vague suspicion that Mrs. Clark was not at home dawned upon her. Had she made her

journey to Portchester for nothing? Again she rang the bell and heard it echo back plainly from a distant part of the house. She was about to turn away reluctantly when a voice above her cried out distinctly:

"Paddy, oh, Paddy!"

Some one had called her name twice! She flung up her head and stared at the shuttered windows. Ague suddenly seized her. Was she again to be tormented with hallucinations as she had been in Montana?

Then, "Oh, Paddy, Paddy!" she heard again.

Her fingers clutched at the knob and twisted it, but the door refused to yield. The house was locked! She paused to listen!

Again her name reached her as she sprang to a window. But, as she examined one after another she was confronted with the fact that they, too, were securely fastened. At first she was impelled to break one of the glistening panes. Instead she ran around the house, where the whole place presented as uninhabited an appearance as had the front.

In response to her frantic jabs on the push button at the tradesmen's entrance, the electric bell sent back to her only empty jangles. Then she pounded on the door loud enough to raise the dead. It was only when she noticed that one of the windows was open behind its screen that she decided all in a minute to force admittance that way, without a thought of what any one might think if she were caught scrambling head-first into a strange house.

With a sharp stone she broke the wire netting, and in another instant was standing in the center of an orderly kitchen.

The third door she opened led to the second floor, and she tiptoed up the stairs. At the top of the flight she paused, all ears. Then she stole along a wide hall, with closed doors on its right and left.

To a small degree she was losing the panic that had accompanied her through the kitchen window. She was near the front staircase when a loud cry issued as if from nowhere, followed by a muffled groan and then silence.

Patricia remained stock still, her hand on her pounding heart, until her name, "Paddy, Paddy," repeated in loud demand, sent her on a headlong race to a room that overlooked the garden.

As if it were a substantial thing, a wall of blackness met her as she pushed open the door. Only by closing the shutters and pulling down the blinds, only by the exclusion of every slightest suggestion of light, could there have been obtained such an impenetrable obscurity.

Breathlessly she dove into it, an almost imperceptible shadow crossing the threshold from the dusk-illuminated hall. Some strangely mysterious noise in the corner halted her abruptly.

Then, "Paddy darling!"

To Patricia's overstrained nerves, the cracked, childish treble appeared supernatural, spectral, like two words from a disembodied voice, a voice divorced from human agency.

"Paddy—Paddy darling!" came in agonized repetition.

Swallowing desperately, Patricia succeeded in dislodging the lump in her throat.

"What?" she whispered, and again more tensely, "What?"

"My God, what's happened to me?" wafted forth to the dumfounded girl. "You can't be here, Paddy! You can't! It isn't possible! He said I was loony, and I am. Paddy, Paddy, are you really here?"

For a moment Patricia dared not go forward, neither did she have the courage to depart.

"Yes, I'm here," she answered in a weak voice.

"Ah, then I'm glad, Pat," was the relieved response.

"It's very dark and cold, isn't it, Paddy? He—tied me in bed, and he won't let me have any light or fire. Oh, what a wicked man he is! And I'm afraid, so afraid of him! Are you afraid, too, darling?"

Sympathy rose from among the tumultuous feelings in Patricia's breast toward that whine in the dark.

"No, I'm not afraid," she uttered.

"That makes your mommy—mommy happy—to hear you—say that,—Paddy!" The speaker faltered between the words with hysterical sobs. "Alex sent Bridget and all the rest of the servants away, and there's a very bad woman in the kitchen. They have both gone now, but shut the door; so if they come back, they won't hear what I tell you. Come a little nearer, boy baby."

Stephen's mother! Mrs. Clark! Patricia's legs suddenly gave way beneath her, and she sank down in a crumpled heap. She could not control her panting breath, but the asthmatic coughs of her companion made it almost inaudible.

Then she crawled to the door and closed it. On her hands and knees she made her way to the bedside. A shutter banged somewhere in the house, and her hands clapped to her mouth to suppress a scream.

"I'm so tired, Patrick," sighed Mrs. Clark. "Alexander quite sent me wild, telling me how you suffered. He said you'd been so disfigured I couldn't even see your dear face.—Is it nice and warm in Heaven, dear? And can't you take your poor old mother back with you? Are you there, Paddy?"

"Yes, I'm here," murmured Patricia between her fingers.

Of course, she was there, but Alexander Clark stood between her and the assistance she desired beyond expression to render Patrick's mother. How she wished she had fetched with her Barney or Martin Brewer!

Then the memory of her days in Chicago sent her to praying. In "The Streams Make Glad," she had recited for the shepherd boy's reassurance:

"If I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. Even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine holy one to see corruption."

And now the Psalmist's declaration clarified her senses. Then she decided that the mother of her dead was a holy one of the Most High, and God was right there. He was everpresent, always available; He was ever willing to help. And out of those inmost thoughts there came to her, all in the fraction of a second, a faith so big, so splendid, that she would be able to save Patrick's mother, that she stood up suddenly. There was not a moment to waste.

"My dear," she said softly. "Poor little mother, I've come to help you!"

Mrs. Clark did not catch the significance of the words. She was still under the feverish impression that her son was in the room.

"It seems so good to have you again, Patsy," she said. "You'll stay with me always, sonny. Oh, you will, won't you?"

"But you mustn't cry," Patricia urged. "You'll try to be brave and help me?"

It took a few seconds for the words to sink into the woman's consciousness.

"Yes, Pat, yes, I will," she quivered. "Can I go away from Alexander? To-night,—maybe, to-night, Patrick? God help me! God in heaven make Alex be kind, only a little kind, to me—for—for once."

Feeling her way through the darkness, Patricia found the door and opened it. Then she flooded the room with light by a quick snap of the electric switch. Finally she

walked to the bed. Mrs. Clark raised her head, but, when she noticed the girl staring at her, she dropped it again to the pillow.

"Who are you?" she gasped.

"I'm Patrick's wife, dear," stammered Patricia, weakening at her task, "and he—he told—told me to come and—and take care of you."

"Then loosen the ropes Alex tied around me, please," Mrs. Clark begged convulsively. "They hurt me so!"

To accomplish this, Patricia had to crawl under the bed, and, when she was again on her feet, Mrs. Clark was sitting up very straight.

"Where's my son?" she asked. "He was here a little while ago. He spoke to me. Where is he? Where is he?"

"He—he—he had to go," Patricia stumbled, at her wits' end for the right words to speak. "But he—he told me to tell you not to be afraid any more, that I was to be your girl, and you're to be my—my mother." And then did Patricia give silent thanks for the last will and testament of Patrick O'Kelleron.

"Alex won't permit it, child," mourned Nancy. "It was only to-day that he struck me because I cried for my boy. He made me leave the town house and come out here, and it's terribly cold. I want to go away—now—this minute before he comes back."

"But he shan't hurt you any more," insisted Patricia gently. "I won't let him."

As if she did not believe it, Mrs. Clark droned on:

"Yes, he will! Yes, he will! He always does! He says he'll have all the money now. I'll be glad when it's gone. He says I'm crazy, but, of course, I'm not! But you're much too small to stand in Alexander's way." She hesitated, and a long cough racked her frame.

"My Paddy's wife," she resumed in a rambling voice.

"That's queer—very queer, indeed! Patrick was a good boy to me! Where'd he go? Is he coming back soon?" She caught hold of one of Patricia's hands, fondled it, then pressed it with her hot lips. "Oh, little girl, don't go away and leave me. Please don't! Alexander is going to put me in an asylum. I know he will. He threatened to this morning when—when I asked to see Frank Shevlin."

Frank Shevlin! He was Stephen's friend! Patricia had seen his name in her husband's will.

"Where is Mr. Shevlin?" she cried. "Tell me quickly! No, you mustn't shake so, dear one. I promise Mr. Clark shan't touch you again. Now, stop crying, and tell me where Mr. Shevlin is. Does he live in Portchester?"

"Yes! But Alex won't let him come in the house."

"Mr. Alex can't help himself," returned Patricia as she darted away.

CHAPTER XXXV

"NEW YORK's all right to do business in a few hours a day, but it's no place to live." Thus Frank Shevlin explained why he practiced law in the city but lived on Long Island Sound in the outskirts of Portchester.

This stormy evening more than a week after Patrick O'Kelleron had been laid beside his father, Frank was resting in his easy chair in his den. His wife, Caroline, had gone upstairs early, and her husband had been spending a half-hour in meditation.

Young O'Kelleron had studied law in his office. Moreover, Frank had known the lad from the day of his birth, had known his father before him and frowned on his mother's second marriage to Alexander Clark. But for that rash act he had forgiven the poor woman long ago, since he was quite sure she had not been happy. Now the lawyer's cogitation was not so much about his dead friend as about Mrs. Clark on O'Kelleron Island.

Of late, since Patrick had gone to Butte, and especially since his death, dark tales from servants visiting servants had drifted to Shevlin about the Clark household; and, since the family had moved to the island, he had made two trips across the piled bridge to verify them. But Alexander had been there to thwart him. He had been unable to hold any conversation with Nancy, nor had he seen her. How sleek, how almost uncanny, Alexander was! He had explained that he had brought his wife to the country early because she was so prostrated by her son's unfortunate death, and as yet she was unable to see any one.

And now Alexander had demanded administration papers in the name of Nancy Clark. Frank did not like the sound of it, but it really was not any of his business, as Caroline had reiterated often enough.

Sighing, he arose to join his good wife, when the telephone broke sharply the silence of the house. The two servants were out for the evening, so it devolved on the master to answer the summons himself.

"Hello," he called. "Frank Shevlin's residence!"

A low, strained voice came to his ear through the tube.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Shevlin! Come over to O'Kelleron Island right away. Mrs. Clark needs you!"

The receiver clicked at the other end before he had time to ask a single question. But, being a man of action, he telephoned for a conveyance, ran upstairs to acquaint his wife with his intentions, and he was lighting a cigar on the porch when the taxi drew up at the curb.

Less than half an hour later, Patricia opened the door of Patrick O'Kelleron's house on O'Kelleron Island the instant Frank Shevlin set his foot on the porch.

"I'm Mr. Shevlin," he observed gravely. "Did you telephone me?"

She nodded assent, and he noticed her childish attempt to stave the trembling of her lips.

"I'm so glad you're here," she said in a stifled voice. "Mr. Shevlin, are you — are you afraid of Alexander Clark?"

She was so breathlessly in earnest, with her sand-gray eyes centered unswervingly upon him, that Shevlin did not answer until he had entered and closed the door. Then he jerked off his hat and overcoat.

"I'm damned well not afraid of the cad, Miss," he rapped out, turning around upon her. "Why?"

A smile of relief lighted up her white face, and the blood came into her cheeks in waves. The coming of Stephen's

strong friend had put an end to the reign of Alexander's cruelty.

"Come in here for a few minutes," she said. "There's fire enough to warm you up a bit. The house is like a barn."

Without replying, Shevlin followed her into a large room running parallel with the porch, and both of them took chairs in silence.

"I was sorry to call you out in the rain," she excused presently, "but—"

"Never mind that," he interrupted. "How about Mrs. Clark?"

A wistfulness became visible about her mouth. It gave her a little-girl-like air that set astir Frank Shevlin's interest.

"Where's Alexander Clark?" he asked. "Is he upstairs with Nancy? Did he tell you to call me?"

"No, he's in New York," she told him, "but Patrick's mother—"

"Where is she?" he asked.

"Asleep now! I'm here, alone with her!"

"What's the matter with her, and what are you doing here?" He rose with an abruptness that seemed in accord with his swift questions. "I can't understand what it's all about. You might start in and give me an inkling of what's happened. First—who are you?"

His voice was peremptory and a trifle stern.

"Who are you?" he queried again, "and how did you get in here?"

Her lids flickered a little. Still she regarded him for a space before she spoke.

"I'm—I'm Mrs. Patrick O'Kelleron!" she answered slowly and steadily, "and—I climbed in through the kitchen window."

As accustomed as Shevlin was to present an undis-

turbed front to the unexpected, he evidenced his astonishment by bending forward and looking keenly at her.

"Ye gods, you don't say so!" he exclaimed. "Did you tell Nancy?"

Then as the picture her words suggested to his mind developed in detail and clearness, he took a couple of strides up and down the room. She was an amazing bunch of girlhood, she who claimed to be the wife of Patrick O'Kelleron. But was she? He stopped directly in front of her.

"Look here, Miss,—whatever your name is," he broke forth. "You know very well you can't come along and break into a house without giving a faithful account of yourself. You've made a big statement, and, if it's false, you'll get into difficulty. Where are your proofs that you have a right here?"

As she began busying herself with the contents of an inside pocket of her jacket, he ceased speaking, and, while he watched her, he hoped to Heaven that she really did have sufficient evidence to make good her claim.

Presently she fetched forth a paper and handed it to him.

"There," she said in a small, weak voice, "that's my marriage certificate."

Strangely moved, Shevlin accepted it, switched on the table light and sat down. He adjusted his glasses, more to gain a moment for self-preparation than from any optical necessity, and then opened the stiff parchment and read it through to the end.

"That's certainly Pat's signature," he admitted, looking up.

"Yes, it is! And this," she explained, extending another folded paper, "this is his will. I wish you to read it, Mr. Shevlin."

A wife! A will! The whole Clark situation changed

in a trice! This girl, still a child, who had evidently married Patrick, had his will! It would, probably, alter the lives of every one on the island; his own future might be affected for aught he knew.

Try, as he would, he could not conceal his emotion. It was so like impulsive Patrick,—this wife business. However, he took the document and without speaking or giving the silent girl a glance, he picked up the hand-written sheet and read it through once and then again. His own name was mentioned in it. The words, "My dear friend, Frank Shevlin," touched him deeply. Patrick stated plainly that he and that chit there, leaning her face wearily on her hand, were to be the executors of his enormous estates in the Sound country and in New York.

"I don't know what to say," he said unsteadily.

Patricia sighed.

"I came here to-day to give the will to Patrick's mother," she continued in an effort to make plain her position. "I didn't want any of his money—*not any of it!* But now, I'm—I'm not going to. I—I—I— want you—"

"To protect your interests, I suppose," suggested the lawyer crisply. "You needn't worry about that part of it. Mrs. Clark is honest, and she would have been appointed to take charge of her son's affairs day after tomorrow, if you hadn't appeared." He tapped the paper in his hand. "But this, of course, will make a difference."

"Yes!" She paused and then got to her feet. "Mr. Shevlin, do you know that Patrick's mother is—insane,—quite out of her mind?"

"Crazy? No!"

"And that Alexander Clark is wickedly cruel to the poor woman?"

Shevlin turned squarely around and centered a pair of startled eyes upon his questioner.

"How do you know that?" he demanded. There was disbelief in his tones. "How do you know?" he repeated.

"Go upstairs and see for yourself," she replied. "She—I mean—I thought you could save her from further abuse if you came over. I must return to New York soon, but I'll come back to-morrow morning.—Can you stay here until Mr. Clark comes? And—and all night?"

"But listen to me!" he began. "What did you tell me your name was?"

For a moment she turned from him, and he waited for her to answer. By and by, without moving, she spoke huskily:

"Patricia O'Kelleron! Didn't you notice it on the marriage certificate?" Then she told him in a few broken sentences how and when and where she had married Patrick O'Kelleron. "Until I went to Butte—" How hard the confession came—"until I went to Butte, I was—I was Patricia Pepperday."

Then, as an ejaculation fell from his lips, she sat down limply.

"Pepperday?" he echoed. "Yes—yes! I know that name. Michael Pepperday! Is—is Michael Pepperday a relative of yours?"

"My — brother! My — dear,— dear — brother," she acknowledged, a break between each word.

His usual composure, gained by many years at the bar, was not proof against this. Here was worse and more of it, he thought.

"Good Lord! Why, Pat convicted that young fellow of murder!" he exclaimed. "That was Patrick's record case."

It sounded brutally coarse, but he had not meant it so. When he saw her crumple up, he apologized:

"I say, child, just overlook what I said, will you? Sometimes I talk too much, or at least my wife says I do.

Now, tell me, was I the first to tell you about your brother and—and Patrick, or did you know it before?"

"I knew it," she breathed faintly, "but not till after I married him!"

All in a minute a perfect Niagara of questions he wanted to ask flooded to the tip of Shevlin's tongue. There was a mystery connected with the girl; it hung over her like a pall.

"Where were you when your husband was killed?" he inquired.

"On the train—going to Chicago." Her words were scarcely audible. "I had left him forever! I never intended to see him again."

"On account of your brother?" was his terse query.

"Yes!"

She made a pathetic figure, there in the half-light, obviously almost at the end of her strength.

Shevlin drew a long sigh. Against his better judgment he found himself believing every word she had spoken.

"If you really must go back to New York tonight," he advised, "you'd do well to start along. It's getting late! But if you want to stay, I'll see that Clark doesn't molest you. It might be better, though, if you were somewhere else, when he gets home. Here, hide these papers, and, for God's sake, don't lose them!"

His whole attitude had changed, and he spoke in such a kindly manner that Patricia held out both her hands. He told himself afterwards it was no wonder Patrick had loved and married the pretty mite. Her very helplessness made him bend his head to catch her words.

"I'll bring my brother, Barney, with me to-morrow. Mrs. Clark will be quite safe while I'm away, won't she?"

"Rest easy on that score," he interjected.

"And—and, Mr. Shevlin, would you mind keeping both my marriage certificate and Patrick's will for me, please. I'd be happier if you would."

And from the time Frank Shevlin shoved those valuable documents into his pocket, he was Patricia O'Kelleron's friend.

CHAPTER XXXVI

INASMUCH as Frank was an old-fashioned man, it went against the grain to allow Patricia to go out alone at that time of night; but, when he broached the subject, she would not even consent to his taking her to the taxi.

Under the roof of the dark porch they solemnly shook hands, but Shevlin did not go back into the house until he was assured that she had reached the mainland end of the piled bridge.

"Patsy, son," were the plaintive words that caused him to curse his own stupidity when he entered Mrs. Clark's chamber. Why had he not forced his way to Nancy before? Why had he not realized the caliber of Alexander Clark? He called her name softly but staggered back as she lifted her head.

"It isn't Patrick, Nancy," he answered. "I'm Shevlin, Frank Shevlin."

She smoothed the disordered gray hair from her temples and raised herself laboriously to a sitting position.

"Patrick's been here, Frank," she informed him. "God let him come, and he left his nice little wife with me. She took off the rope Alexander used to tie me in bed, and she says she'll let me live with her, and—and she sang me to sleep. It's the first time I've been happy since my boy died. You won't let Alex hurt her, Frank, will you? He's very strong, Alexander is!"

It could not be that this wreck of a woman was Patrick O'Kelleron's mother. This shattered creature was not the Nancy he had known.

Unable to speak, he caught the hand that fluttered toward him and held it between his own warm palms.

"Frank," she whispered, "do you see Patrick anywhere?"

"No, dear," he returned. "No! No, indeed!"

"Then don't go away to-night and leave me.—It's night, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's night, and I'm going to stay, dear Nancy. Lie down and go to sleep again."

"No, I can't sleep, I can't, Frank," she whimpered. "Don't I look a little—just a little bit ill?"

"God," shuddered Shevlin.

He drew a chair close to the bed and sat down.

"Nancy," he burst out, "Nancy, did Alex—"

An expression of terror crossed the woman's face.

"Hush," she answered, trembling. "Alexander is in an awful temper. He might come in any minute; he mustn't catch me telling you my troubles. A very queer, yellow-haired actress came along with him the other day, a girl he called 'Babe.' I didn't like her, and I told him so. Because I resented her being here, he beat me. He's—he's going to put me in an asylum as soon as he takes charge of Patsy's money. He told that woman so right before me. Oh, how they both laughed! I'm—I'm not crazy, Frank!"

"Of course, you're not," soothed Shevlin in a brotherly fashion, "and you're not going to any asylum, believe me! Pat's wife appeared just in time to head off Alex' game. So, don't you worry! Now then, I'm going to have Doctor Watkins here to-night. He'll make you comfortable. I'll telephone him this minute. Why, Nancy, don't you believe me when I say Alexander shan't hurt you?"

"Don't leave me, don't go away," she cried.

"Only to telephone to Doctor Watkins," he encouraged, and her sobs were quieted by her faith in his promise.

When he passed into the hall, he met Alexander rushing

up the stairs two at a time. As they confronted each other, surprise colored Clark's countenance crimson.

"Oh, my dear Shevlin, how in the world did you get in here?" he asked with an astonished twist of his lips.

"By the front door, of course," was the reply. "How'd you suppose, Alex? I didn't fly down the chimney, and I'm not a fellow to break into another man's home."

"But the door was locked," faltered Clark.

Then he was impressed with a picture of Nancy, wriggling from under her ropes and against his express orders descending the stairs to admit the one man he had constantly vowed should not enter the house.

"I had a bit of news for you, Alex, so I ran over," Shevlin announced, "and I was shocked to see Nancy in such a condition."

To conceal his growing consternation, Alexander flicked his handkerchief across his face.

"Frank, it's a thousand wonders she isn't worse, poor darling," he rejoined in sympathetic tones. "Pat's death quite unbalanced her mind. I am frightened to have her move about when I think of how she fell downstairs. She insisted she was going to find him somewhere. She simply wouldn't stay in bed until she was herself, as I wanted her to."

"So you tied her in!" snapped Shevlin. "And a doctor, Alex! Why hasn't she had a doctor?"

A slight shrug of Clark's shoulders indicated how lightly he was impressed by the question.

"Now, listen to me, dear boy," he urged. "Nancy could have had a doctor or anything else she wanted. But really, Frank, I don't think it's necessary to call Watkins in at this time. After a while when she gets used to Patrick's absence and realizes that he is dead, I won't have to use such stringent measures."

He spoke with confidence, suavely, courteously, all the

time hiding the inward exultation that, after two days, no one would be privileged to enter here without his permission or invitation. Another forty-eight hours would put it out of the power of any one to disturb him, in his suddenly acquired affluence. It was this knowledge burning in his breast that superinduced his most affable manner.

"Come along to my den, dear Shevlin," he invited smiling, "and shed your precious news on my most willing head. We'll have a sociable drink. Pardon a moment. Mrs. Clark is calling me."

"No, she's calling me," protested Shevlin, moving forward.

A ringing laugh burst from Clark.

"My dear Frank," he exclaimed, "it's evident you don't know Nancy as well as I do. While she's an old dear, I must admit she always plays to the gallery."

Nevertheless, the lawyer followed close behind Alexander.

Shrinking away from her husband's extended hand, Nancy began to cry.

"Oh, Frank, stay with me. Don't leave me alone with him. I'm so—so afraid. Get away, Alex! Don't touch me!"

"There, there, Nance, be quiet," responded Shevlin, stationing himself near the bed. "I'll just stay here with your wife, Alex, till Doctor Watkins comes. You see, she wants me to. You trot down and telephone and tell him to bring along Miss Browning. Nancy needs a nurse."

Two pairs of masculine eyes battled a moment. Then, angrily, Alexander whirled on his heel and departed.

And not until Frank Shevlin saw that Mrs. Clark was in the competent hands of Miss Browning, a sympathetic, buxom woman, and Doctor Watkins had taken his departure, did he retire with Alexander to a commodious

room adjoining the library. Ah, how many times he had enjoyed himself there with Patrick! It infuriated him, Alexander's proprietary manner.

"Now, you've humored my wife, Frank, I hope you're satisfied," Clark said as sweetly as if butter would not melt in his mouth. "The dear thing can be as theatrical as she likes with soft old Browning. Nancy loves to have a fuss made over her, and she's just in her element with Archibald Watkins hanging around. Sit down a while! What would you like to drink?"

"Nothing! Not a drop of anything, thanks! I'll smoke, though." So saying, Shevlin took a cigar from his pocket.

Naught but the realization that he would soon be at liberty to resent the intrusion of this legal old busybody had carried Alexander through the last trying hour. With assumed nonchalance he seated himself, extracted a cigarette from his case and lighted it.

"I'm rather curious to learn how you got in here, Shevlin," he remarked, harking back to the question that especially interested him. "I'm perfectly sure the house was securely locked when I went away. In fact, we have but one servant now, and I gave her leave to take a run to White Plains. I left after she did. Did Nancy come downstairs?"

"I'll explain all that later," drawled the lawyer, his head enveloped in a cloud of smoke. "Want to hear a bit of gossip?"

Almost at the end of his patience, Clark assented.

"Yes, I suppose so, though I'm not much concerned with the wags of Portchester. I'd like to choke a lot of scandal-mongers in this town."

Shevlin laughed.

"But most of 'em mean well, I imagine, Alex. However, I'll miss my guess if you're not interested in this.

As it happens, it didn't come from the tongues of Portchester.—The most surprising thing has transpired; Nancy can't be appointed administrator now."

With incredulous scepticism Alexander's mouth opened, and his usually drooping lids spread wide. What had his wife said to Frank when he was alone with her? Perhaps, that she did not wish to act as administrator of her son's estate. If that were so, he would give her good cause to change her mind.

"And why not, pray?" he inquired with an effort not to appear disturbed.

"Well, it's like this," answered Shevlin, his eyes, under thick shaggy brows, scrutinizing the other's face. "You'll remember how I used to prod Pat to make a will, and how he always put me off. Well, it seems he did make one without my help, and it's cropped up at last."

"Hell!" The coming of so harsh an expletive from Clark's polite lips indicated how tremendous was the shock of the lawyer's announcement. Then Alexander recovered himself in a measure and added, "How do you know?"

Not in many years had Frank Shevlin enjoyed himself as he did at that moment. In tantalizing deliberation he tapped his cigar over an ash tray.

"I've seen it," he asserted with a smack of his lips, "and I've had it in my hand, Alex."

"Let me see it, too," exclaimed Clark, partly rising.

Taking out his watch, Shevlin counted off twenty seconds with Alexander half out of his chair.

How provokingly slow the old codger was, Clark told himself, with difficulty repressing his eagerness.

"Let me see it, Frank," he insisted.

"No, not now," refused Shevlin as his timepiece went into his pocket, and Clark settled back. "Sit still, and be easy, Alex. The affair is a wee bit complicated and needs

a little explanation. Besides, my dear Alex, you certainly have more sense than to imagine that a man would carry about loose a will bequeathing millions. You're too wise for that!"

Involuntarily his hand went to his chest, and he chuckled audibly at the memory of a gray-eyed girl producing the valuable document in question.

By main force Alexander kept his seat. He was as positive that the man before him had upon his person the title to the fortune he craved, as that he was living.

"Tell me about it."

"It was drawn by Patrick himself, in Idaho Falls in the State of Idaho; the exact date I've forgotten," observed Shevlin. "It is in the usual form, signed by Pat at the end, with a full attestation clause and two witnesses."

"Never mind all that technical stuff," thrust in Clark. "What's the substance of it? What did Patrick do with his property?"

"The first clause provides for the payment of his debts and funeral expenses," the lawyer continued with tranquillity. "Really that was an unnecessary precaution, you know. The law would see to that, anyway."

Bending forward, Alexander queried, "Of course, then what?"

"The second clause is the disposing part of the will." Shelvin stopped and cleared his throat while he watched the other man's strained, expectant attitude.

"Would—would you mind, dear boy, reading it as it is written?" came pleadingly from Clark's pursed lips.

With a puff of smoke, Shevlin blew the question aside.

"Don't get in a sweat, old man," and he grinned. "Everything in its order. You won't relish the fact, Alex, that—that Pat left everything to—his—wife."

In a most undignified manner Alexander bounced up. He turned giddily around and sank down again.

"What?" he cried. "His wife! Patrick didn't have a wife!"

"Apparently he did," was the mild answer. "Anyhow, a girl came here to-day who says Pat married her."

"Did you see her, Frank?"

"I certainly did—to-night! She telephoned me to come over, and she's one damned pretty woman, too. Take my opinion on that! She—she let me in, so don't put the blame on Nancy." Shevlin's words were muffled by the short spurts of smoke which accompanied them. "I saw her marriage certificate, also, Alex, signed by Patrick. You couldn't fool me on that boy's scrawl in a hundred years. So I've made up my mind she's the genuine article." He made a gesture with his hand as though to indicate that that practically settled it.

A long silence ensued during which the lawyer smoked furiously, and Alexander contemplated the tips of his boots in deep meditation.

"Did Pat cut his mother off entirely, Shevlin?" he exploded at length.

The question gave Frank the opportunity he had been eagerly anticipating. Figuratively speaking, the propitious moment had arrived in this interesting game to play his winning cards.

"Pat was a remarkable fellow," he philosophized approvingly. "He had a superior insight into human nature that slipped by me as well as I knew him."

He smiled a wide, enigmatical grin at the corner of the room. Then he turned to his rigid neighbor.

"You'll agree with me, Alex," he took up, "when you hear that the boy requested his wife to provide suitable support for Nancy as long as she lives. Patrick stated plainly that, if he gave anything to his mother outright, you'd waste it."

Heartily as the speaker disliked the handsome Alex-

ander, he was inclined to pity him then. There he sat, the unfortunate, huddled over dismally, pulling his fingers until the joints cracked. Humming a tune through his nose, Frank prepared another cigar for lighting. He struck a match and held it aloft and glanced up. And then,—he found himself looking into the barrel of a revolver.

“Give me that will, Frank,” ordered Alexander, his lips drawn back from his gleaming teeth. “Put your hand in your pocket and hand it over.”

There was no blandness in Clark’s erect figure, no suavity in his low, commanding voice.

Shevlin’s face went white as the cold steel met his temple.

“All right, all right, my dear Alex,” he agreed. “You don’t have to kill me to get what you want. Surely you know that.”

The hand that held the gun slumped slightly, and the cold muzzle, lurching away, gave Shevlin the chance he needed. With one direct blow he knocked the weapon to the floor, and another, more forcible still, landed Alexander on his back.

Pouncing on the gun, Shevlin swept it into position, ready for use.

“Quite theatrical, Alex,” he laughed down at his opponent. “One of the best bits of acting I ever saw! Did the peroxide blonde you flashed on Nancy touch up your ability in bounderism? She did a good job, I swear! Get up, you idiotic four-flusher!”

At the peremptory order, Alexander arose from the floor.

“I’m glad I made your nose bleed, you rascal,” rasped Shevlin, “and you’re lucky it isn’t worse! If it weren’t for the scandalous mess it would get your wife into, I’d open a hole in your hide and let daylight clean through

you. Now, plump your damned elegant person down in that chair while I make you a classic speech you'll remember to your grave. Squat, Alexander!" He slowly lifted the revolver and repeated, "Squat, my friend!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

So it happened that the moon had made but one complete cycle around the earth since Patricia O'Kelleron had answered Nancy Clark's ghostly "Paddy?" with a whispered "What?" when the court stamped its seal of approval upon the last will and testament of Patrick O'Kelleron.

That was a miserable moment for Alexander Clark. However anxious he had been to prevent the probate, he really could have done nothing more than to make a little delay; and even that he was induced not to attempt during a private conversation with Frank Shevlin and Mrs. Patrick O'Kelleron.

As it was still March and blustery cold, Patricia's first move was to open the Park Avenue house in New York and establish her home there.

Quite ill with unspoken suspicions that all was not as it should be with Michael, Yum-yum came from Balmville in one of the O'Kelleron sedans.

Mrs. Clark, better in health, was transplanted from the chilly discomfort of O'Kelleron Island to the snug warmth of the city house.

For Patricia herself, the month had been a period of introspection and reconstruction. Fame before the footlights no longer attracted her, but her ambition for her brothers soared skyward, when Martin Brewer placed Barney in a Broadway show as understudy for the leading part.

There were unendurable moments for her over Michael. Especially had she suffered the day she had told him of her marriage, but Frank Shevlin had lightened her burden

by accompanying her to Ossining. Oh, the hearty handshake he had given Michael! Assurances, too, of his aid for a new trial. The advisability of applying for a pardon was discussed. The lawyer thought it improbable that executive clemency would be extended so soon, and Patricia and Michael objected to it because it would not remove the stain of the conviction, even if it were granted.

"Pat O'Kelleron would have dug up evidence which would have been an entering wedge for an application," Shevlin had avowed, "so I guess I can. Buck up, Pepperday, and good luck to you."

Now that she had some liberty, Patricia decided to devote a part of the wealth, so strangely and unexpectedly hers, to the use of the poor and unfortunate; and roughly her purpose was to supplement and assist Martin Brewer's "God save 'em!" work.

Arrangements were made for that between herself and Martin one evening when she was calling at Brewer's.

The tale of how the parrot had come to join the family circle Benny told her eagerly.

"I don't believe any one was going to harm George at all," he asserted. "Anyway, I couldn't get a word out of Fancy about it after the first day she came here. She's a lot happier, though, than she was then. Did you notice, Lady Pat, how plump her cheeks are?"

"Yes, Benny," answered Patricia, "and it was the kindest thing you ever did, to help that poor child. I want to do something for her myself."

It was Benny's belief, so he said, that Fancy was miserable in her mother's house. He insisted that she had neither the wit nor strength to do the work expected of her and was depressed by her separation from George.

"I wish I could have her with me," said Patricia, "but, of course, I'd have to consult her mother before I make any plans."

So that idea sent Patricia back to Forty-eighth Street the next day.

"Why, m' dear," remarked Mrs. Cavendish, "I'd like to know what under the canopy you want with my girl. She's about as much good as a rag doll. Now, what do you want of 'er?"

"I'm fond of Fancy," evaded Patricia.

"Is that sayin' you think I'm not," flared the housekeeper, suspicious that her character as a parent was being attacked.

"Certainly not, Mrs. Cavendish! Of course, not! But you see I lived here long enough to know that she is a trial to you. There're so many things she could learn if she had the opportunity. She likes me, and, if you agree to let me keep her, say five years—"

Then the sum of money Patricia offered was a persuasive consideration with the busy landlady.

Thus it came about that one morning Fancy, all smiles, took George from the Brewer home and carried him to Park Avenue in triumph.

Some days later when Frank Shevlin entered his offices at Number 120 Broadway, he greeted a tall man who arose slowly.

"Were you waiting for me, sir?" Frank asked, divesting himself of his outer garments. "Chilly, isn't it? We're going to have a late summer from the feel of it. I drove in from Portchester, and it was anything but pleasant. Did you say you wanted to see me?"

"Yes," was the stranger's husky reply. "If you have a little time, I'd like to see you privately if I may."

Glancing at his watch, Shevlin nodded.

"I've an appointment at eleven," he said. "That gives us thirty-five minutes. Think that will be enough?—All right, then! Come into my private office."

There was a peculiar something about his caller that

aroused the attorney's interest. He saw, without seeming to be curious, that the powerful face was very pale and thin to emaciation. Heavy, dark spectacles, encased in bone settings, shielded a pair of eyes which Frank imagined, were weak and near-sighted. The poor fellow looked as if he had been through a long period of sickness. However, the lawyer made no remark as he piloted him into a large, sunny room.

"Take a seat," he invited with a hospitable flourish, settling himself in his desk chair. "There! Fire ahead!"

"I want to retain you as my attorney," stated the stranger abruptly.

"In difficulty—eh?"

"Yes!"

"But I certainly have to know the nature of your case before committing myself," Shevlin pointed out. "Believe me, it's quite customary. So, if you'll proceed, we may get somewhere."

"I'm very glad," remarked the other ambiguously.

"And why should you be glad, pray?"

"You don't recognize me! You don't know me!"

"No, I don't!"

"No recollection of me at all?"

"Not in the least!"

As the other man arose, Shevlin heaved himself to his feet, ready for any emergency. His would-be client was acting suspiciously like an escaped lunatic; a nervous woman could not have trembled more violently. Obviously the big fellow was laboring under great excitement.

"Yes, sir?" Frank encouraged, and that was all.

As if struggling out of a hypnotic sleep, the stranger drew a long breath. One thin hand went to his glasses, and he lifted them off.

"I—I'm Patrick O'Kelleron, Frank," he uttered with extreme difficulty.

After that neither spoke for several minutes. Patrick O'Kelleron was awaiting recognition. Frank Shevlin was staring into familiar brown eyes, eyes he had believed closed to sight forever. He stood rigidly, unable to grasp that his vision had not played him false, that his ears had heard aright. But that steady, warm gaze belonged to none other than Patrick O'Kelleron, the boy he had dandled on his knee as a fat, round baby, the boy he had taught to swim, to fish, to shoot and a thousand and one things that go with advancing youth. In that palpitating silence he recalled a passionate, red-headed, fatherless youngster who had been as dear to his childless manhood as the flesh and bone of another's flesh and bone could be. He swallowed a sob and leaned against the desk inertly. Patrick O'Kelleron had risen from the dead! Slowly his kindly eyes filled with tears, and he dropped back into his chair.

"Pat, boy! Patrick!" formed on his stiff lips.

Instantly Patrick was at his side, and, as convention is forgotten in the bigger moments of men's lives, his arm went around Shevlin's bent shoulders.

"Frank,—father!" he murmured in appeal.

Oh, that heaven-born word, "Father!" It touched Frank Shevlin's spirit like a benediction; it swept away that transcendent sense of loss, and it dried his tears.

"God sent you back to me, son," he murmured thickly. "I'm not—asleep—and you *are* alive! Why, why, you're—my—boy, my Pat!"

"Yes, I am your boy," brought Shevlin up standing.

"If you are Pat, who was the man buried in your family vault, I'd like to know?" he demanded with a sharp, involuntary gesture. "I—I myself attended a funeral—" His voice softened as he abruptly changed the subject. "Sit down, sonny. Wait a second while I call off my appointments for to-day."

Five minutes later, when he returned, he was still extremely pale, but there was a peacefulness in his eyes that had not been there since that day he had stood, weeping over a closed, black coffin. Because he was of a temperament that always gives praise for God-bestowed gifts, he said, on sitting down at his desk:

"I feel so stirred up, Pat, so happy, so grateful, right in me here," he flattened his hand over his heart, "that I can't get all the breath I need. Tell your friend what happened to you."

"It's hard to sort out just what did happen to me," said O'Kelleron. "But the Butte police must have mistaken Eddie Blake for me."

"Eddie Blake!" came in startled tones, and then again, "Eddie Blake! How—how—"

"What caused his death I don't know," interposed Patrick jerkily. "He might have killed himself, or he might have been blown up with the house."

"But you, son, you! You came, and I didn't recognize you."

"No wonder you didn't, Frank! I couldn't believe I was myself when I came to my senses. I'd been weeks in a Chinaman's hut. I was told that a couple of Chinese prospectors found me, literally full of holes and dying. My voice is about gone, and I've lost every ounce of fat I ever had. My hair fell out, too, and this—" he passed his hand hesitantly over his thick, dark hair,—“this,” he went on, “is a wig. I've got red fuzz on my scalp like a new-born—”

He stopped in his explanation. There had been a tinge of whimsicality in his tones as he spoke of his bald pate, but it was wholly gone when he burst forth:

"My mother, Frank! Where is she? And Alex Clark—"

"Nancy's much better than she was, old man," inter-

rupted Shevlin, rubbing his hands together, "and, goodness me, won't she chirk up now you're home? But you'll have to break it to her gently, or she'll keel over worse than I did."

Then he laughed a little. He thought of Nancy overwhelmed—Nancy weeping—Nancy rising in the bliss of renewed motherhood. Then another lightning picture came into his mind. A solemn, gray-eyed girl! Ah, Patrick's wife! And he sighed. Would Patrick's coming back lift the shadows from her lovely face and put again the spirit of youth within her soul?

"Do—do you remember that you—were married, Pat?" he questioned abruptly.

A hungry, haunted look swept into the brown eyes that were studying the speaker. Then Shevlin realized that there had been a tragedy in the Montana mountains outside of that appalling explosion. His suspicions, born of what little Patricia had told him, were confirmed. He felt strangely sorry for his pale, young friend there—sorry for the girl on Park Avenue.

"I see you remember it, boy," he commented softly.

"God, yes; that's the one thing I do remember," cried O'Kelleron. "That's what sent me home almost before I was able to walk. I—I found out that—that my wife came east—from Alf Carraby, a friend of mine in Butte. Where—where is she, Frank? Have—you—seen her?"

"Seen her?" repeated Shevlin, controlling a desire to ask questions. "I should think I had seen her. She's living in your town house with her own folks and your mother."

The signs of anxiety faded from O'Kelleron's face. It was as though many nameless dreads had met sudden extinction.

"Tell me all about it," he begged at last.

It took considerable time to repeat the happenings in

the O'Kelleron household since first Patricia had appeared upon the scene. When, with the eloquence of a well-seasoned lawyer, Shevlin described Mrs. Clark's condition the night he had been called to O'Kelleron Island, Patrick's fleshless jaws snapped together in a rigid, angular line as if they had been made of steel.

"Damn that Alexander!" he growled. "If once I get my fists on him!"

Then Frank Shevlin laughed a hearty laugh that eased his pain.

"I advise you to go a little light on poor Alex, son," he chuckled. "Say, Pat, what your wife's been doing to that malevolent skunk is a plenty. She delivered him a piece of her mind a mile long! And she's cut him down to cigarette money. He complains she doesn't give him enough to buy liver for a pet cat. Great Scott, I laughed to my heels while she was tongue-lashing him, and Alex—Well, he withered under her gray eyes like the devil cringes before holy water. She isn't bigger'n a pint of cider, you know, but, oh, my! Well, Pat, she trimmed the handsome Alexander,—head, wings and tail feathers. The best thing that ever happened to your mother was that girl looming on O'Kelleron Island with your will." His face assumed a sudden gravity. He bent over and went on in quieter tones, "I really believe, if she hadn't showed up, boy, you wouldn't have had any mother to go see. Nancy'll chirk up now you're back, though, but you must be prepared for a great change in her, Pat. I imagine she'll be quite herself, which she hasn't been since— Well, at any rate, you can go home and start in where you left off."

Now, what had he said to make his big boy slump over in his chair like that and look as if he were ready to faint at any minute, too?

"Paddy?" he began urgently.

"I can't go back to my wife, Frank," came in odd defiance from O'Kelleron, "and there's not the slightest use considering it." He paused and turned away slightly. "You can't imagine how thoroughly she detests me! I remember—before— I'll tell you now that Eddie Blake shot me in a quarrel over her."

"Shot you?" echoed Shevlin. "What in the world happened? She did tell me she had left you definitely, but she didn't mention Blake."

"She wasn't there when he came, that's why! She'd been gone—hours."

Then in a voice scarcely above a whisper O'Kelleron told his story, punctuated with many pauses and lapses into silence.

"That accounts for the explosion then," said Shevlin. "The newspapers spoke of dynamite lugged into your house by a servant."

"So Carraby said," nodded Patrick. "He saw my wife in Butte the evening before the explosion. She ran away without leaving me a word. I must admit the truth to you, to myself. She simply couldn't bear the sight of me! Frank, she hates me worse than poison."

"I'm not so sure about that," demurred the lawyer.

The instant he had voiced his doubt, he was glad, for his boy straightened and looked more hopeful.

"She never told you she cared anything for me, did she?" was demanded of him huskily.

As though he were trying to remember something, Shevlin remained quiet. He was half-tempted to lie, and, after lying stick to it, to keep the glisten in the brown eyes that were searching the very marrow of his soul.

"No, I can't honestly tell you that she did," he admitted. "At least I don't remember it, but this much I can say! There isn't another woman like her in the world. She takes up a duty—"

"But I won't have her look upon me as a duty," Patrick rasped back. "I couldn't stand it, Frank. I do believe, though, if she'd known how I felt about her brother—"

"She does know it now," Shevlin cut in with. "I told her myself!"

The eager statement did not lessen the hurt in O'Kelleron's eyes, nor did it give him any heart.

"She couldn't bear even to look at me!" he exclaimed. "It sent her into hysterics whenever I asked her to. And I—I—, like a blamed fool, kept simply imposing—" He broke off but continued again almost immediately, "If it wasn't for clearing up Blake's disappearance—"

Some hours later Patrick O'Kelleron registered at an uptown hotel as "John Hullworthy, New York City."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE afternoon subsequent to Patrick O'Kelleron's arrival at Frank Shevlin's office, Patricia sat by herself in her sitting room. She was dressed simply in black, her widow's weeds corresponding in color to the dearth in her soul. Sometimes love and longing fetched Stephen Claypoole from the hills of Montana so near that she stretched out her arms as though to greet him. Ever she refused to visualize him in the O'Kelleron vault, although very often, swamped in bitter loneliness, she drove to the cemetery with flowers. But she always came away from the city of the dead, affirming to herself that her man was not back there in the narrow house.

To-day she was considering and reconsidering her accumulated duties that had broadened her activities.

Occasionally a scrap of conversation drifted to her from the room across the hall where Mrs. Clark and Yum-yum were engaged in fitful talk. Those two, Nancy and her own wee mother, Patricia called her "dear babies," her "little children." And children, indeed, they had become, those sorrowing women, grown old in a few months, waiting for their sons.

Dear Yum-yum! Little mother in a darkened world, feeling about for a loved one she could not find! As the days slipped by, Patricia had observed that strained, watchful expression become habitual to the blind face. Yum-yum was eating out her heart for Michael, and how often and with what suppressed anxiety did she ask for him! Time after time his letters had to be reread to her, those precious missives she fondled by day and tucked under her pillow at night.

With the keenness of the unseeing, she sensed that something had happened to Michael. No fabrications they wove, nothing they did, drew her out of that attitude of tense listening.

No wonder Patricia was utterly cast down. She had spent the evening before with Martin Brewer, and together they had examined reams of paper covered with reports from the detectives who had endeavored to obtain new evidence for Michael. Money had been spent freely in this manner but to no seeming avail. Two sleuths had occupied Barney's room at Cavendish's, poking their inquisitorial noses into every corner and cranny of the house until one day, at a warning from William Foster that they were not actors out of work, Mrs. Cavendish had given them their walking tickets. However, the report stated plainly that the Foster brother and sister could not be inveigled into chummy conversations. They passed most of their time with Alexander Clark who had taken up his abode at the Forty-eighth Street rooming house. Nothing had been discovered because there was nothing to be discovered.

A dreadful thought this, that made Patricia stumble to her feet and walk restlessly to and fro.

The ringing of the telephone bell brought her out of her sad reverie. After closing the door, she crossed the room and took off the receiver.

Her almost uninterested "Hello!" was responded to by Frank Shevlin's voice.

"Yes, Mr. Shevlin," she answered eagerly. "I'm glad you 'phoned me. I've been intending to call you since morning."

"Why? Is anything the matter?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes! Mr. Brewer showed me the detectives' reports!"

He heard her choke and uttered a few unintelligible words. Then:

"That doesn't say something won't crop up when we least expect it, Mrs. O'Kelleron," he articulated. "I'm most sorry, but you can see for yourself that we can't apply for a new trial without new evidence. Yet, I wouldn't feel so badly if I were you."

"But my mother!" Patricia broke in. "Oh, Mr. Shevlin, she's so unhappy!"

Again she ceased speaking, and the man at the other end of the wire was silent, also. At length,

"Are you there, Mrs. O'Kelleron?" he said.

"Yes! Yes, Mr. Shevlin! I'm—"

"Please don't do that, please don't, my dear," he urged. "Say, I'll tell you what I'll do. I have here with me an extraordinarily clever young fellow. His name is John Hullworthy. I'll shoo him along up to-day, and you talk to him. I've known him for years, and you can place all confidence in him. Anyway, I've been thinking lately that I'd ask you if you'd mind some one else taking hold of my end of Patrick's estate. I'm terribly busy."

"Does that mean that I won't see you sometimes?" came in subdued tones.

"Not at all, my dear girl, certainly not! If I can do anything for you at any time, just give me a ring. But Hullworthy is a good financier, and you'll find him practical. Here, here! Now, don't—don't! Things will turn around for the better, I'm sure. It's always darkest before dawn, little lady."

When Patricia was notified by Johnson, the butler, that Mr. John Hullworthy was waiting for her in the drawing-room, she was sitting with her mother and Nancy.

"Perhaps, it's something about Michael, Paddy," sighed Yum-yum. "He's been gone almost a year."

With filling eyes Patricia impressed a kiss upon her mother's face.

And, as she walked down the long flight of stairs, a sort of terror took possession of her, swaying her fiercely. She passionately insisted that, as Michael was innocent, there must be some way to prove it.

A very tall, thin man was leaning against the mantel when she entered the drawing-room. He was so absorbed in thought that he did not hear her soft footfall, and not until she said "Good afternoon" did he whirl around.

"You are Mrs.—Mrs. O'Kelleron," he stammered in unmusical tones.

"Yes, and you're Mr. Hullworthy," she returned. "Mr. Shevlin 'phoned me you were coming, and you're very welcome."

Keen, brown eyes behind the smoked glasses took in her slender, black-robed figure in one glance. Then he bowed over the slim, white hand she laid in his broad palm.

"Thank you, Mrs. O'Kelleron!"

His voice was even more husky than before, and a little rasp in the shape of a cough cut into her name as he pronounced it. He gazed at the lovely, somber face. Her gray eyes were shadowed by dark circles, and she looked very weary! He would have given anything in the world to know what her memories were of the husband she thought dead and whether she ever really regretted him.

But in silence he took the chair she pointed out, and she perched her small self in the corner of a large divan. His eyes grew more than misty behind their colored shields. Truly she was like a bird, a frail young creature who had beaten its wings against the rocks until they were bruised and broken. His heart seemed to turn a somersault as he remembered how many times he had named her "My birdie!" in Butte. With self-upbraiding he also recalled that he had helped to implant that expression of sorrow on her countenance.

"Mr. Shevlin gave you some information about my affairs, I suppose," she began presently.

To hide his twitching muscles, Hullworthy bowed and pressed his handkerchief to his mouth.

"Your finances I'm fairly familiar with," he responded. "This morning Mr. Shevlin turned over to me the books of the O'Kelleron estate, but he said you had a private matter you wanted to discuss with me."

"Yes, I have," she admitted slowly.

The great, round glasses, shining at her like sparkling, dark wine in a white bowl, filled her with a desire to ask him to take them off. He was such a big, big, solemn man with big, big spectacles, that she stood just a trifle in awe of him. Perhaps, it was his rigid erectness that made her study him speculatively through her partly lowered lashes.

At the same time emotion was raising ructions in the territory about Hullworthy's heart. His blood, like streams of molten lead, was warming every vein in his body. Frank Shevlin had facetiously remarked it would not be an easy matter to keep Patrick O'Kelleron in the background. Frank had warned John Hullworthy to be careful, and he was being careful. Was he not sitting as upright as a stick, his tongue tied in knots, waiting for her to say something else?

But she did not seem inspired to confidences. She had dropped her eyes and seemed to be thinking deeply. Now what was distorting his vision? Oh, nothing! Nothing! He was only plainly seeing that the thumb and forefinger of her right hand were twisting a ring—his ring—slowly around and around.

"It's a splendid old room, this," he finally managed to say.

"I like it," she stated simply.

Now to business! He set his teeth.

"I'm keeping you, I'm sure," she apologized, "but I scarcely know how to begin."

"Is it so hard?" he queried lamely.

She sighed like a tired child, and Hullworthy swore internally at Patrick O'Kelleron. That gentleman had been on the verge of stepping out and declaring himself.

"Yes, it is—very," she replied, and she moved restlessly. "I suppose every one has something in his life that's difficult to talk over with strangers."

And was that not so? He had a sealed room of his own which he had not unlocked, even for Frank Shevlin.

"That's true," he agreed with a stutter.

"But since I've been sitting here," she went on, "I've decided that you're just the man to help me. I feel it myself, and Mr. Shevlin said so, too."

Here was the chance of his lifetime! He would clear his throat, so his voice would not sound so much like the croak of a frog, and place himself and his entire time at her disposal.

She slipped to her feet and came toward him, and, as a flock of birds scatters on wing at a strange presence, so his thoughts took flight at the vision of approaching loveliness.

"Please don't get up," she said in strangled tones. "I'll sit down again in a minute. But I'm very nervous. I'm horribly upset to-day."

Forthwith, not experiencing relief in walking, she sank into a chair near him. He was positive if she wept—and she looked as if she were about to—he would never be able to hold O'Kelleron within bounds. However, she simply sighed again and tucked a stray, dark curl into a mass of other dark curls.

"I'm afraid I shall cause you a lot of bother before we're through," she began in a wistful way, "but I'll be ever so grateful if you can help me."

"That's my errand here," he pointed out almost gruffly.

"I have a relative who's in serious trouble," she started, and then, to Hullworthy's consternation, she did burst into tears.

Doggedly he clung to his chair. If he moved an inch, Patrick O'Kelleron would go plump on his knees, and that would end everything.

"Mr. Shevlin told me Mrs. Clark wasn't at all well," he interjected, as she wiped her eyes. "Forgive me for speaking about it now, but I was intimately acquainted with her son, and I thought, perhaps, she would like to see me."

"Of course, she would," she nodded. "It always does her good to—to see her—her son's friends."

She had ceased weeping, and he was glad of it.

"Do—do you love her, I mean, like her?" he ventured scarcely above a whisper.

"She's a very dear woman," she faltered, "but I wish I could do more for her. In health she seems to be much better, but— Possibly, Mr. Shevlin told you that she is obsessed with the idea that her son's coming back to her."

"Yes, yes, he did. Could I—do you think—I could see her to-day?"

Without hesitation she stood up.

"I'll run see." But she paused in her flight to the door and, turning, glanced at him. "It was kind of you to speak of Mrs. Clark, to—to change the subject so tactfully. I do thank you. I'll try very hard not to cry any more. Excuse me just an instant."

A few minutes later, when she returned, she found him looking at two oil portraits, his thin, white hands clasped together behind him.

"Mr. O'Kelleron's parents," she explained, stepping to his side.

"Yes, I know!" was the throaty reply. "I think I rec-

ollect hearing that Pat's father died when he was quite young."

"I believe so," she agreed.

While she was resuming her seat on the divan and arranging the cushions at her back, he wiped his glasses without taking them off.

"Mrs. Clark was very much excited when I told her about you," she broke forth finally.

With eagerness he demanded:

"What did she say?"

"Oh, it's so sad—the poor dear!" A forlorn shake of her head accompanied her words. "She insisted that I come right down and bring Patrick up to her. She really scolded me a little because I told her you were not her son but his friend. Mr. Hullworthy, I never have the courage to—to talk as if he were dead."

She checked herself, noticing that his face whitened and that he was strangely moved. It came to her that he must have been very fond of Patrick O'Kelleron. Every day she ran upon new proofs of how much her husband had been loved.

"What you told me about your relative interests me hugely," he interposed quickly. "What if you go ahead with it—now, before I see Mrs. Clark?"

The sympathy in his husky voice struck clear home to Patricia's heart.

"I will, and thank you!" she ejaculated. "Forgive me, if—if—"

Was she going to weep again? No! Thank Heaven, she was not! But he felt hurt to the quick when she swallowed desperately a number of times.

"Yes?" he prompted gently.

"It's so difficult to talk about it to a—a stranger," she breathed.

"Count me a—" Patrick O'Kelleron very nearly popped

out "husband," but after the thrilling pause John Hullworthy spoke the word "friend."

"Thank you," she said. "There are three of us. We're triplets, my brothers and I. Michael, the youngest of us, is—is— Oh, Mr. Hullworthy, he was sent innocent to prison. He was accused of a crime he never committed. We've been trying to discover new evidence, but so far—we haven't found a bit. There must be a clue somewhere!"

Then she struggled up and stood before him, a tragic figure of girlhood.

"My brother being innocent, there must be some one who is guilty, Mr. Hullworthy!"

Then, because she wanted to conceal her feelings, she turned away.

Emotion shook Hullworthy like a gale as he got to his feet. Wherefore Patrick O'Kelleron argued that Patrick O'Kelleron could accomplish ten million times more in New York than plain John Hullworthy could. John's retort to this was, that if O'Kelleron had not been such a stupid ass in Montana, he would not now be staring out at his beloved, his eyes swimming behind disfiguring glasses.

"That's very true," he blurted, "and, if you wish, I'll begin directly to unearth the fellow, whoever he is. The first step will be to talk with your brother. Can you arrange to go to Ossining to-morrow?"

"Yes, of course," she sobbed behind her handkerchief, "and something tells me in here," and she laid one small hand on her heart, "that, if you take hold of it, he will be free soon."

Then there fell a silence which seemed difficult for either of them to break. At length, impelled by a morbid desire to discuss her husband with her, Hullworthy put out a feeler.

"I remember your brother's trial very well, Mrs. O'Kelleron. It was conceded by men who followed the facts that Mr. O'Kelleron—"

She turned upon him almost fiercely.

"Please don't mention his connection with my brother at all," she nipped his tentative investigation in the bud. "I—I find I'm happier if—if I don't talk about—about my husband."

Agony, shot through with disappointment, crushed Patrick O'Kelleron's hopes and reeled John Hullworthy back on his heels. He was thankful then that her face was hidden. Finally, to stay the storm in his soul, he asked:

"May I go and see Mrs. Clark now?"

And sighing, she consented.

CHAPTER XXXIX

As Hullworthy opened the door for Patricia to pass through, Patrick O'Kelleron stated a dozen good reasons why the glasses and wig should be thrown off, why he should be permitted to look into his wife's eyes and implore her forgiveness. He was willing to do anything rather than hold merely episodic relations in the grind of settling up the O'Kelleron estate. He did not give a hang for the money. He would make over all his possessions to her. He would assure her that he knew she had no love for him; he would not even mention his own.

But John Hullworthy was persuaded that such a course would be fatal to his chances of ever again entering the house and the presence of the little girl he was following out of the room. He would rather be her friend than the adored lover of any other woman living! Oh, paradise, to be near her daily, to watch the exquisite movements of her hands and listen to her lilting voice!

"You'll be careful what you say to her, won't you?" cautioned Patricia, as side by side they walked up the broad stairway.

"Of course—very discreet," he responded.

"I hope you don't think I'm wicked, Mr. Hullworthy, because I keep her spirits up by acting as if Patrick were alive?" she whispered, when they reached Mrs. Clark's door. "It makes her happy when I talk about him."

So unexpectedly did Patrick O'Kelleron bob up that, if John Hullworthy had not been on his guard, the fellow would have demanded then and there just what her idea was of Mrs. Clark's son. But Hullworthy contented himself with observing:

"Patrick would approve of that, I'm sure."

"Then wait a minute," she answered.

She opened the door, went in and left it widely ajar.

How the sight of the familiar furnishings whirled him back to his childhood! There, within its sanctity, he had come in boyish joy and sorrow for maternal praise and consolation. Now, as a broken-down man, he longed for the sound of his mother's voice and her enfolding arms.

When he caught sight of her sitting opposite another woman in the bay window, her now quite gray locks showing from under her braided cap, he put out a hand for support. Frank Shevlin had warned him to be prepared for a change in her. But such a change! She had none of the high bearing which had made her conspicuous among women. Had Alexander Clark been in his presence at that moment, Patrick would have wreaked upon that rascal some of the fury that almost strangled him.

Tear-blurred, he watched Patricia glide across the room. His own incompetency showed in an ugly fashion as he saw her lean over the dear bent figure; not even by declaring himself now could he stay the dissolution that was creeping upon it. Deeply agitated, he whipped out his handkerchief and cleared his glasses.

"Now, you'll be happy, dear mother," he heard Patricia say. "Patrick's friend is here to see you."

Then turning, she smiled at him and held out her hand.

Somehow he stumbled to her side without betraying himself. He was blind to every emotion save the one that nearly prostrated him at his mother's feet.

"Darling," went on Patricia, "this is Mr. John Hullworthy. He is very fond of Patrick."

Mrs. Clark peered up at him and passed one feeble hand across her near-sighted eyes.

"I'm glad to know you, Mr Hullworthy," was her greeting as he pressed her fingers. "I—I've never met you before, have I?"

"I think not," mumbled John, scarcely audible.

"Now, let me introduce Mr. Hullworthy to my little Yum-yum," added Patricia, "and then we'll have a nice chat. My mother, Mrs. Pepperday."

To guide it to her mother's, she took his hand in hers, and she was conscious of the tremor that ran through him.

The few inarticulate words he uttered neither she nor Mrs. Pepperday understood.

"Perhaps, my daughter told you that I am blind," Yum-yum said simply. "Pardon my not being able to see you."

Hullworthy wanted to crave pardon for himself. He could not see anything, either, through the tears that blurred his spectacles.

"May I sit down," he begged. "I should like to stay a little while if I may, Mrs. O'Kelleron."

"Surely!" she accorded him. "Any friend of Patrick's is always welcome here. Isn't that so, Mommy Clark? Now, we'll put this chair right over near you.—There, Mr. Hullworthy!—I'll sit over here with Yum-yum."

Suiting the action to the word, she established herself on the broad arm of her mother's rocking chair.

Then there fell an awkward silence which Mrs. Clark finally broke.

"It was very kind of you to come, sir! I suppose you haven't seen my Patrick lately, have you?"

A quick look shot from Hullworthy to Patricia, in response to which she shook her head. He crushed the desire to fling discretion to the winds and cry his sonship so all could hear. He forgot for the instant the prime factor in the plan Shevlin and he had so painstakingly laid out. The girl on the arm of the chair

ceased to exist for him, and only the fear of the shock the *denouement* might give the dear invalid kept him in restraint.

"My son came once since they said he was dead, when I was very ill on the Island," Mrs. Clark droned on, unheeding the fact that she had received no answer. "He brought Patricia to me then. He promised to come again, too. Do you think he'll be here soon, Mr. Hullworthy?"

This time he took his cue from his own pumping heart.

"Yes!" he said with emphasis.

"That's good! He must be very busy not to come home for so long. Well, boys will be boys! His father said that once, when Patsy was three years old. The naughty child had dripped ink all over the library rug. Yes, boys will be boys, Mr. Hullworthy."

Then the reminiscent note dropped from her voice.

"I like you, sir! I wish you'd stay here! Somehow, you seem very near and dear to me."

While Hullworthy's dark head was bent over Mrs. Clark's hand, Patricia silently used her handkerchief.

"Patrick," murmured Nancy, smiling, and then she hesitated. The eagerness faded from her face, and she excused herself by saying, "Ah, pardon me, Mr. Hullworthy! For the moment I thought my boy was here. I'm getting old, and my mind goes astray sometimes."

"Why, you know you're getting better by the minute, Nancy," Mrs. Pepperday chided. "You must remember how bad off you were and not expect to be well all at once."

"Yes, yes, I know, I know! I know it, wee Yum-yum! But, if I didn't feel sure I'd have my Patrick soon, I couldn't keep up at all. The days seem so long, and I'm so lonely!—Even if he doesn't write, I'm sure he loves me."

And she began to cry weakly.

The very air bristled with hysteria. The man's bony frame shook, and Yum-yum gave a small gasping cry. There is no telling what would have happened just then if Patricia had not moved forward.

"I think, perhaps, dear mother," she interposed, "Mr. Hullworthy had better leave now and come again some other time."

But this did not agree with Nancy's wishes at all. She clung to the large hand, lamenting wordlessly.

"Here, dearest, you mustn't cry," consoled Patricia, unable to hide her own feelings. "Don't you know, when you sob like that, you're always ill for a day or two?"

"I want my sonny boy," wept Nancy.

"Of course, you do! But, darling heart, you must be good. Let me wipe your eyes, and you say good-by—"

"I don't want to say good-by," came in a wail. "Let him stay with me, Paddy dear, until Patrick comes back. Perhaps, my boy will be here tomorrow."

"But I'll come to see you every day, Mrs. Clark," offered Hullworthy thickly. "That is, if Mrs. O'Kelleron approves."

"If the little mother is very good, you shall," acceded Patricia. "You may come as often as you like. Why, Mommy Clark! Oh, you mustn't, you simply mustn't!" She paused and laid one slender finger on her lip thoughtfully. Then, "Well, listen, honey, if Mr. Hullworthy can spare the time, he may stay a while. Afterwards you must take a long nap. Doctor Watkins will scold us tomorrow if you're worse."

She went close to the silent man, and again the faint, delightful odor of violets fanned his nostrils.

"Quiet her," her lips framed, and she passed on.

After the door had closed behind Patricia, Hullworthy glanced at Mrs. Pepperday, who sat with her blind eyes turned towards the sunlit window.

Of a sudden he dropped to his knees and slipped one arm around Mrs. Clark and then lifted his glasses. With his lips pressed against her ear, he whispered:

"Mother, dearest dear, I've come back! Your boy is back, my own!"

Nancy ceased crying on the instant. She smiled beatifically through her tears and let her head fall forward against him.

There followed no sound in the chamber save the slight creek of Yum-yum's chair and the tick-tock of the clock in the corner. In spite of the monotonous tale the pedulum was repeating, time ceased for mother and son.

At length Nancy's steady, even respiration signified that she slept. Carefully he laid her back against the cushions.

Then, crossing to Mrs. Pepperday, he said in an undertone:

"She's asleep, and I'm going now! When she wakes up, tell her I'll come back to-morrow."

So hard did Yum-yum's eyes look at the speaker they seemed almost to pop out of their sockets.

"I heard you tell her you were her son," she breathed. "That was good of you! We always agree with her that he's coming back. It makes her happier."

Two drops of water rolled from beneath the man's wine-colored glasses, but the blind woman heard only his long-drawn-out sigh.

"May I kiss you, Mrs. Pepperday?" he asked.

Mrs. Pepperday smiled; she liked this man who had poured balm on Nancy's heart wound.

"Of course, you may," she consented. "You're very kind! Blind folks don't need to be told that a person is good. They know it without telling."

With one hand on his cheek, she returned the pressure of his lips.

"Keep your head down here a minute," she pleaded. "I want to say something. Please don't tell Patricia I spoke to you about it, though. I have a son, a dear, dear son, as dear to me as Patrick is to Nancy, and he's abroad. But I can't get it out of my mind but that he's in trouble. Could you bring him to me, or at least find out about him?"

Like a child she laid her face upon his hand, and he felt her warm tears.

"You shall have him," he promised without hesitation. "I give you my word for that! Try and be patient."

Then whirling on his heel, he went from the room.

When he stepped into the hall, Patricia arose and spontaneously thrust out her hand.

"Isn't it pitiful?" she choked. "She does long for her Patrick so!"

"She went to sleep," interjected Hullworthy hoarsely. "She has the idea in her head that I'm her son. It may have been wrong, but I've quite established myself with her as—Patrick and—"

A shrill voice from the music room cut off his words.

"Ma's jaw wags," it squawked. "Is breakfast ready, Fan?"

As a slim girl scurried across the reception hall, a parrot balanced on her shoulder, Hullworthy stopped short on the stairs. His eyes followed the slight figure with interest until it disappeared.

Aware of his astonishment, Patricia explained:

"That's Fancy Cavendish; she lives with us. Poor baby! She's weak-minded. To-morrow she's going to my aunt's in Balmville to stay until we leave the city for the summer. Doctor Watkins thinks she needs country air. We have great hopes that she will improve both bodily and mentally, for Martin Brewer— Do you know Mr. Brewer at all?"

"I've heard of him," faltered Hullworthy.

"He has a lame son," she continued, "and Mr. Brewer has discovered a surgeon who is extremely clever. Doctor Blair says that Benny—Benny's Mr. Brewer's son—and Fancy can be operated on after the hot weather, and that they'll both be quite normal. It's so wonderful to think about.

"You'll come in again to-morrow morning before we start for Ossining, won't you?" she queried, smiling, as he reached for his hat. "Mommy Clark will want to see her—her Patrick every day now."

And, throttling Patrick O'Kelleron, John Hullworthy almost tumbled down the front steps.

CHAPTER XL

MARTIN BREWER's right thumb had swiveled around his left unremittingly while he had absorbed, spell bound, Adelina Pepperday's account of her astonishing adventure. In a breathless ferment, she was seated opposite him on the window-seat in the O'Kelleron drawing-room, one palm cupped to hold her chin.

Since she had flung open the door to admit him and Frank Shevlin, Martin had been thrillingly cognizant that she was amazingly pretty, with the blood mantling her cheeks, her eyes lustrous gray and radiant.

Suddenly he was electrified by the thought that his day of reckoning with her had arrived. Until this moment he had not allowed himself to reflect long upon how essential her presence and friendship were to his happiness. He had not dared!

In Balmville, when he had discovered that Adelina meant more to him than Patricia, in all her glorious youth and distinctive beauty, he had resolutely drawn back into his empty life without a word of explanation. And so he had become used to stifling his hunger for her by stating that honor must ever ride in advance of personal desire. She might better think him rakish and unstable than find herself in a whirlwind of notoriety, defenseless. Some day Benny's part in the killing of Fatty Funny Breeches would become public; then she would understand why he had ceased coming to her home. But in the same breath he had added time and again that Adelina was established firmly within his heart, never to be supplanted by any other woman, and that thought descended upon him now.

"Aunt Addie," he began feverishly and then desisted in his overture.

The expostulatory gesture of his hands and his voice, anguished with uncertainty, made her turn pale and shrink back until her head rested on the stack of pillows propped up against the window casing. An onslaught of timidity so overcame her that on the spur of the moment she felt that she must spring up and run away.

For a straight ten minutes she had been talking in tremendous excitement and had forgotten that she had vowed never to speak to Martin again. With a deeper sense of the self-abasement that had seized her in Balmville, when he had abruptly discontinued his visits, she lowered her lashes and remained still. She was as positive now as she had been on that epoch-making day that a single indiscretion of her own had reacted unfavorably on his conception of womanly modesty. Since then he had neither called on her, nor had he telephoned. Humiliation had untiringly accompanied her wherever she went, and the longing to see him, to explain away the happening, had not been absent day or night. How could she have been so far oblivious to her chaste up-bringing? But in excuse for that she had told herself that it was her ignorance of worldly wisdom that had caused her to err.

"Why didn't you send for me this afternoon when you needed help?" came to her ears, just as she was particularizing the occasions when her fingers had tingled in his close, warm clasp.

The one short glance she flashed at him disclosed how pleadingly he was scrutinizing her. Instantly she looked away.

"Addie, why did you 'phone Frank Shevlin and not me?" he insisted. "It hurt me to get the word from him instead of you."

Useless question! He knew very well why! She would not have been a Pepperday had she thought of looking to him for masculine protection. And it was all his own fault, too. Ah, that haughty tilt to her dark head was extremely becoming, or would have been if directed at another man!

"Addie," he began again, like an embarrassed boy, "you haven't forgotten what I told you last year at Balmville that—that—"

His words raked the wound still fresh in her heart. Her assumed frigidity melted, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I shall never forget it," she returned with a sad, negative gesture. "Such things are not — forgotten."

Although she evidently cared enough about him to admit her pain, it struck him like a crack from a whip that the barrier raised by his own seeming neglect would remain an insurmountable obstacle between them. But, as "Never say die!" is the length and breadth of all egotistical love, he ejaculated:

"But you'll forgive me, dear, when you know all about it. A dozen times a day I've been on the point of 'phoning you. If I talked until Gabriel tooted his trumpet, I couldn't make you understand how I've suffered."

"I've suffered, too," she murmured faintly, "and I almost perished from shame."

"Surely, not because I kissed you, dear," he interjected. "You admitted that you loved me, and our loving each other made that kiss a holy one. Now, when I tell you—"

"I'd rather not talk about it any more," she interrupted fiercely for one so gentle. "I was more to blame than you. Much more! I believed at one time that you had only imagined that you loved Patricia, and — that you were fond of me. I know very well now what changed you.

Then I didn't understand — men, that's all. Now, I do!" She caught her breath. "I beg of you to forget all about Balmville —"

"But I don't want to forget about Balmville," he persisted passionately. "I want to remember it always. Addie, let me hold your dear hand while I ask you something."

A quick throb of her heart contradicted the negative shake of her head.

"My hand shall stay just where it is, Mr. Brewer!" The touch of frost in her voice lent an air of unmistakable decision to her refusal.

Some men are irretrievably overthrown by a woman's denial, but not so Martin. He had seen his error and set out immediately to rectify it. If he could not in all honor ask her to marry him, he would sue for a comradeship such as he had experienced that short time in the past. He eyed the small fingers he coveted and noted that they were so tightly clasped that their nails were almost blue.

"I shall ask you just the same," he stated doggedly.

Bewildered, she glanced up at him.

"Addie, would you stand by a fellow if he were knee-deep in trouble?" he demanded without further preliminaries.

His peremptory interrogation came as a shock to Adelina. She had never associated trouble with him, even in the slightest degree.

"Of course, I would," she assured him, startled. "You know very well I would," and he had known it in his heart of hearts.

"Ah," slipped from between his teeth on a breath. "Yes, I believe you would, Addie."

"I'd give my life to help Michael," she whispered.

A sudden pity seized him as she shuddered. There

passed through his mind the vision of a boy in a shepherd's costume, and that boy's gray eyes, beautiful in uplifted purity, stared out from his momentary memory of "The Streams Make Glad." Michael Pepperday, as David, the innocent herder of Judea's sheep, was as innocent now as he had been then! He wanted to lay bare his cowardly conduct to the little woman there who had without hesitation said she would be loyally near in a crisis. Had the lad in Sing Sing been other than the one she had long ago chosen out of the babies three, nothing could have held back the divulgence that Michael was paying to justice an unjust debt.

That desire was but little less than his wish to take her in his arms and kiss away the grief that had puckered her face and the mist that insisted on clinging to her lashes. What would she do if he boldly produced that secret from its lurking place in all its ghastly ugliness?

But he did not have to search far for an answer to that speculation. Without weighing the question, she would refuse to sacrifice Michael for Benny even until autumn, and he knew also that she would not give him an hour's grace in which to prepare a defense. For a moment he followed her mentally on her flight to the State to demand her boy. It was seeing himself surrender his crippled son at the gates of Sing Sing that brought him to his feet. Never before had he directly thought of approaching that stronghold of stone and tears to leave within its walls his unhappy child. If all the world's innocents were shackled together in throngs behind prison bars for Benny's guilt, even then would he hold his tongue.

Surely, if Adelina's attention had not been directed elsewhere, she would have been suspicious of his desperate emotion. But she was looking out into the street and had caught sight of John Hullworthy guiding the run-about to the curb.

"Goodness me, here they come now," she quaked. "I don't know how I can break it to the poor child!—Oh, Martin, tell me how to do it!"

So easily had his given name escaped her lips that she could have been accused, and not unjustly, of having pronounced it daily. In an instant he responded to it. Tenderly he helped her up, nor did he loosen his hold on her arm when she stood tremblingly erect.

"Steady, now, Addie," he coaxed, anything but steady himself. "You've been such a brick! There's not another woman who would have had your nerve."

"But I didn't have time to think," she told him with catching breath, "or I wouldn't have dared to have done it, and, oh, dear, I'm afraid Fancy and I maimed him for life."

"He deserved much more, little woman," he reassured. "If Shevlin or I had been here, he wouldn't have walked after we were through with him."

The outer door banged, and Martin's hands were fingering the lapels of his coat when Mrs. O'Kelleron, followed by John Hullworthy, rushed into the room.

At the sight of her aunt and Martin so close together and so badly flustered, Patricia stopped short.

"What's the matter?" she gasped. "Why are—those cars outside?"

The color going out of her face, she stood in hesitation, and Martin went forward a pace.

"Shut the door, Mr.—Mr.—" he exclaimed to the tall stranger just over the threshold.

As Hullworthy turned to obey, he replied in low tones: "Hullworthy's my name, John Hullworthy."

"And mine's Brewer," rejoined Martin, "and let me present Miss Pepperday, Mr. Hullworthy.—Lady Pat, one car's mine, one is Frank Shevlin's, and the other belongs to Doctor Watkins."

He had spoken coolly, but, still apprehensive, Patricia took a few faltering steps toward him.

"But why are you all here at once?" she queried, quivering. "Why don't you tell me what's happened?"

Flashing entreaty from one to the other, she met Adelina's gray eyes, and, delaying no longer, Miss Pepperday flew across the room and took her niece into her embrace.

"Oh, darling, forgive me," she appealed. "I didn't get here on time. I was delayed two trains because Miranda had a boy calf, and he has rings of white all around his hind legs, and Miranda's as proud as if she'd had twins."

Patricia kept her curiously bright eyes upon the tremulous speaker a moment. Then she began deliberately forcing her aunt's arms from about her.

"Let me go, Aunt Addie," she said tensely.

"No, you mustn't run upstairs now, Paddy pet," urged Miss Pepperday. "Come, sit down, my blessed, and, oh, don't tremble so."

With her under lip between her teeth, Patricia stood in doubt. That something dreadful had occurred while she had been in Ossining with Michael was apparent, but Aunt Addie and Martin did not seem inclined to tell her about it.

Solicitous to shield her from useless worry, Hullworthy spoke to Brewer.

"Relieve her mind immediately," he said, laying stress on his command.

"Well, her mother's quiet now, sir," answered Martin, "and you might as well sit down, Patricia, because you can't go to her until Doctor Watkins says you may. There isn't a thing you can do, so be patient and listen to what your aunt and I have to tell you. There, that's a good girl!"

"I'm sure we crippled him between us, Pat dear," protested Adelina, sinking down beside her niece. "I didn't mean to hit him quite so hard—not quite—and Fancy struck him on the head with the tongs! She was so excited—"

"Alexander Clark has been here. He was on the eve of removing Nancy and what valuables she had from the house when your aunt arrived," Martin interrupted.

A wordless ejaculation fell from John Hullworthy, and his large hands doubled into formidable fists. He had turned swiftly toward the door, but Brewer's next assertion somehow caused him to change his mind. What Martin had said was:

"Nancy is a brave woman. You may all believe that! She didn't break down until Alex took himself off, and now Frank Shevlin is with her. He says she's as right as right."

"Wait till I tell her the rest, Martin," Adelina cut in impetuously. "Paddy, I shall never forgive myself for not doing as I said I would when you 'phoned me last night about your going to Ossining. I intended taking the early train, but I didn't on account of Miranda." She paused to wipe her eyes. "Of course, when I got here, I used my own key to open the door. It was a good thing I did, for there wasn't a soul who would have let me in. Then I went up to Nancy's room, and there she was, all dressed, and, oh, that brute—Well, she said afterwards that he said he was going to take her away with him. Why—why—he actually told the poor dear that he would have her declared insane. Think of it! He's decided to divorce Nancy and marry that Foster girl who lives at Cavendish's."

The horror on Patricia's face, intensified by the slowness with which the story was unfolding, forced Brewer to interpolate:

"But Nancy wasn't hurt at all, Paddy. Scared a little, of course! Shevlin's going after Clark as soon as he leaves here. Alex will find that Nancy, as well as her property, is fast held away from him."

"I should hope so, Martin!" Miss Pepperday's eyes sparkled angrily. "Well, honey, as I was about to tell you, he was there, taking all the jewels out of the safe, when I appeared. At first I stood right still, blinking, because I didn't know what was going on. Charlotte was out of her chair, and, when she screamed, that wicked man sprang up and knocked her down."

A half-smothered cry dragged itself from Patricia's throat.

"My little mother!" she groaned. "Martin, Aunt Addie, don't keep me away from her."

But Adelina only hugged her the tighter.

"Wait, Paddy! Doctor Watkins sent Martin and me away, and—and she's better now, I'm sure," she soothed. "That Clark, Paddy, he has a regular pussy-cat smile. He didn't notice me until after he had struck your mother. Then he began slipping toward me, grinning from ear to ear."

So near was she to a complete breakdown that Martin encouraged her by saying:

"But it was mighty fortunate you fetched your umbrella with you, Addie!"

Then, indeed, did Adelina rise up in righteous wrath. A quiver passed around her lips, but her eyes became the color of granite in her response.

"Fortunate," she choked. "It was more than that, Martin! Why, Paddy, I—I gave him a thud on the nose with the handle of your grandfather's umbrella. I meant to say, two thuds, maybe three. And all the while I was thanking my good Heavenly Father, and I thank Him now, for clouding the sky this morning. I said to myself,

'Adelina, remember your pious father's words,' 'If there isn't blue enough to make a sailor a pair of breeches, go prepared for rain,' and there wasn't, and I did."

"But Yum-yum?" broke in Patricia, sensible only of her own bitter anxiety. "Where was she all the time?"

"Oh, my dear,—my dear," Adelina sobbed, "you've never heard anything like it! She was shrieking for Michael till I thought the neighbors would hear her, and she just wouldn't stop."

"But, as much as I wanted to comfort her, dear, I couldn't then because Fancy Cavendish was beating Alexander's head with the tongs. Poor child, she had quite lost control of herself, and, if I hadn't interfered, I don't know what would have happened to him. As it was, he could scarcely get down the stairs."

"But the servants, Miss Pepperday?" ejaculated Hullworthy sharply. "Mr. Brewer, where were the servants?"

In explaining this, Martin said that the butler had gone away on an errand for Patricia, and at the end of a revolver Alexander had marshalled the female servants into the laundry and locked them in until Miss Pepperday had released them.

He was adding to Adelina's narration of Mrs. Pepperday's collapse when, to every one's relief, Doctor Watkins opened the door and walked in.

CHAPTER XLI

THE greetings between Doctor Watkins and the quartette of nerve-racked people were mere acknowledgments of each others' presence. In the center of the room he stopped short, his handkerchief running over his eye-glass lenses in palpable indecision. Then,

"I'm at my wits' end," he uttered, with a dubious shake of his head.

Such a hackneyed phrase from a man so voluble of speech as Archibald Watkins, augured that it was the forerunner of bad news.

Several times he broke the silence that followed with a cough and once embarrassedly used his handkerchief. It was evident that he was having an inward struggle to regain his professional aplomb.

"I can hardly persuade myself, Miss Pepperday," he began in a deprecatory manner, "that you informed your sister-in-law that her son, Michael, would be in from abroad to-morrow?" He hurled the conclusion of his words straight at Adelina interrogatively.

"Of course, she didn't," Patricia exclaimed swiftly. "Certainly not! My aunt wouldn't think of doing that."

"But I did, Paddy," Adelina admitted. "Of course Charlotte didn't believe me, Doctor Watkins. I only told it to quiet her. She didn't believe one word of it. Charlotte isn't as silly as that!" and then she repeated, as though she were talking to herself, "She didn't believe a single word of it."

Even the confidence her voice gathered as she talked made no impression on the physician. He was just fresh from Charlotte Pepperday's bedroom. He knew what he

knew, and it was his duty to put the matter in an open light before her family.

"That's where you're mistaken, Miss Pepperday," he protested seriously. "I'm sorry to have to insist that she certainly does believe it."

"But Michael can't come, Aunt Addie," cried Patricia in tragic accents. "You know that, dear!—How *could* you tell her such a thing."

Instantly Adelina arose, and a few unsteady steps took her to Doctor Watkins' side.

"I'll explain just how it came about," she quivered hysterically. "You see, she screamed for him so, I had to tell her something." Then she wheeled around to speak to Patricia. "Paddy, she wouldn't listen when I said you'd be home shortly and that Barney would be in soon from rehearsal. Oh, darling child, —" Her voice broke, sank to a whisper and discontinued.

The pencil, tapping against Doctor Watkins' teeth, sent staccato sounds through the silence. Never before, as he had expressed himself to Shevlin, had he faced such a dilemma.

Yet, somehow, he must cut the Gordian knot and set to rights the chaos into which his patient had been pitched head foremost. In his opinion Charlotte Pepperday's feeble frame held a soul a saint might envy. Not only his professional skill but a very pronounced personal predilection were engaged in her behalf. His sympathy went out to Adelina, too. The recollection of his own struggle with the blind woman made it quite easy to find excuses for the falsehood that had been told.

"However, dear lady, don't feel so badly at what you've done," he said. "There! There! Sit down again, and listen to what I must say."

His touch was very tender as he laid his hand on Adelina's arm. She was crushed with such a weakness

that she was thankful for the chair which Archibald set out for her.

"Perhaps," she commenced feebly, "I'd better go up and tell her that I—"

"I beg of you not to do that, Miss Pepperday," the physician cut in. "It would never do."

If there were a clue to the labyrinth in which they were all groping, certainly he did not expect her to supply it.

"Mrs. O'Kelleron," he ventured after a while, "your mother has had a severe shock. In all my practice I've never known a case like this. Considering her condition, it was most unwise to make her a promise impossible to keep, especially one so vital. But, of course, I don't want to place too much blame on Miss Pepperday. I feel sure that at the time she never imagined the serious outcome of raising false hopes."

Humanity was one of Archibald Watkins' chief assets. Moreover, he knew, without being told, that Adelina did not need censure from him. She was suffering enough without it.

"I'm sure that you didn't mean any harm, Miss Pepperday," he said lamely.

"But I can't see what got into me to tell her that yarn," came from her in distraction. "If anything happens to little Charlotte, Michael will never, never forgive me! What have I done? What shall I do?"

More to herself than to any one in the room did she make her last appeal. She, Aunt Addie to the three most beautiful children in the world, had brought upon them a calamity awful in its possibilities.

"My baby, my Michael, my own, own boy," came in a whisper from her lips.

Then it was that Patrick O'Kelleron almost jumped into the tragedy himself. John Hullworthy was a newcomer in this afflicted home; no matter how much he

wanted to soothe its sorrowing mistress, he had neither the standing nor the ability to do it.

However, when Patricia struggled to her feet, he ventured to touch her arm.

Without paying any attention to him except to shake off his hand, she centered an intense regard on Doctor Watkins.

"Will she—she die?" she stammered with livid lips. "Oh, Doctor Watkins, tell me—do tell me the truth!"

"I certainly will, my child," was his gentle reply. "I'm always truthful to my patient's relatives. That's one rule to which I hold strictly. Your mother is too weak to be told that she cannot have her son. As I've said before, I'm at my wits' end."

When Adelina turned her wistful face to Martin, a sharp pain shot through his heart.

"Martin dear," her lips framed. At least, if he had not heard the words, her woe-begone eyes pulled at him like a magnet at steel. He left his seat and drew a chair up to her side.

"My dear," he exclaimed miserably, "you did it for the best, and no one can doubt it."

At that she turned her head and wept softly. She could not deny, however, that she was a wee bit comforted when he covered her shaking hand with fingers strong and warm.

That there was no best about the situation was not only expressed in the doubtful shake of the doctor's head, but he said so.

"It would be quite evident to all of you if you had the smallest conception of the savage spell Mrs. Pepperday has had with her heart," he continued with reluctance, "and it's my firm belief that she is holding on by the very slender thread of hope that her son will be here tomorrow."

Many times in Martin's long and arduous "God save 'em!" work, he had held a woman's hand to help her over rough places, but never had he been so touched, so hurt in a vital way. Yet, Adelina's clutch thrilled him. She had forgiven; she had forgotten.

"But can't you make some excuses to Mrs. Pepperday?" he asked the doctor. "Have the boat Mike's supposed to be on held up at sea, or something like that."

"Indeed, Mr. Brewer, I would if I could," the physician replied, curiously affected, "but even that's out of my power. I haven't the smallest excuse. The poor soul believes that the ship has been docked."

Every pulse in Patricia's body bounded at his avowal. The last prop which could hold up the frail, blind mother had been hacked away ruthlessly. She entertained no reproach for Adelina, no condemnation for any person living. Her bosom was burningly full of sympathy for Yum-yum. With tragic pathos she crossed to the speaker.

"You must do something for her," she breathed, white-lipped. "Oh, something must be done, Doctor Watkins! It must be!"

"I can't see what, my dear," he answered sadly, "but now, listen to me!" and he took her cold, limp hand. "I'm not prophesying that she won't get well. What I said was that her disappointment, when she finds that her son doesn't come home, might prove fatal—only might, mind you! I want you to be prepared for the worst. She's very weak and physically unable to support another shock."

His voice ceased, and poignant stillness fell. How, as a reputable physician, could he bolster up hope in the daughter who looked as if some relentless hand had dealt her a death blow. Heaven knew he would if his conscience had been less exacting. Surely, he *was* at his wits' end. Motionless, he watched Patricia. She was no

longer trembling, but her gray eyes burned like coals fanned by an inward flame. She was studying him with an expression he could not fathom. This was one of the times when he wished he were anything but physician-in-chief. He looked down into the girlish face, so thin and colorless, and stretched his lips to smile. But he groaned inwardly, convinced the concern which twisted his mouth awry only added to her wretchedness.

"Poor child," he said, unnerved.

Then, "Michael can come home to-morrow," she asserted with difficulty.

The impossible fruition of her statement fetched a cry from Adelina. Irresolutely Doctor Watkins shook his head. Women got queer, unreasonable notions at times, but who could blame this poor girl if she left no stone unturned in her effort to help her mother?

"You mustn't expect that of the State, Mrs. O'Kelleron," he told her. "The fact is, on a chance I begged Shevlin to get the lad a leave, but he said it couldn't be done. At any rate it would be useless to bring him here for a day or two. But even if that could be accomplished, the excitement of a short visit merely — No, Mrs. O'Kelleron, in that event, in justice to myself, I must ask to be relieved of responsibility. Heaven knows I want to give her every opportunity, but— Now, I'll run upstairs and have a look at my patients. And in the meantime I hope that you will be able to think of something that will give that poor little woman a chance for her life."

And he whisked out of the room.

CHAPTER XLII

OPPRESSIVE was the quiet after the door had closed. Neither the departure of the physician nor the quick snap of the latch impressed Patricia in the least. She stood in the same spot, holding the same posture of immobility. Any conversation among the other three was silenced. How could they conjecture aloud on the probability of Michael's coming home as she had stated when she seemed to have left them in spirit?

Something very like panic grew in Hullworthy's breast. On the way down the river he had expressed his ardent conviction that her brother was an innocent man and had based sanguine hopes that he would soon be at liberty on the principle that truth cannot forever be hidden. Of course, reliance on his statements had influenced her when she had said, "Michael can come home to-morrow."

To wrench the lad from prison under present circumstances would not be a whit more feasible for him than to heave the earth out of its orbit by the pressure of his own shoulder. As John Hullworthy, he was helpless; as Patrick O'Kelleron—

When he had covered the space between them, Patricia stirred and glanced up at him. He almost lost his balance when he saw how ravaged she had become in the last few minutes.

"Sit down, child," he murmured brokenly.

A stiffening of her whole body accompanied her gesture of dissent.

"No, no, I can't sit down," she returned with sudden vehemence. "I've something to tell Martin and Aunt

Addie,—you, too, and—and it'll be easier if I stand up."

For a moment she became quite incoherent, tearless sobs shaking her.

"I've been very—very—wicked," she choked.

Her stammering confession brought Brewer to his feet. Her lovely face, pinched with tragic wretchedness, and her eyes, widened with horror, struck him as out of proportion to any childish indiscretion that might have been on her tender conscience.

In that anticipatory lull she lifted one hand feebly, and John Hullworthy caught it. Then he passed through all the pangs of hell as she clung to him. Yes, he had seen her suffer before in those cruel Montana days, but nothing—nothing like this.

Once, twice, a third time she attempted to speak, but her cramped throat refused to make an audible sound.

"My dear, my dear," he groaned huskily, not remembering that she had met John Hullworthy but yesterday.

Oh, the richness of sympathy in his four short words! There was drawn from her torn, inmost heart an overmastering gratitude. This tall stranger suddenly became the rock of Yum-yum's salvation and the deliverance of the King of the Pepperdays. She had forgotten Martin and Adelina, forgotten everything but that she had a story to tell John Hullworthy. He would listen—he would understand!

"Michael isn't going to stay in Sing Sing any longer!" she asserted tremulously. "He didn't kill Arthur Brown! I—I did!"

If a bomb had plunged through the window from Park Avenue, and Patricia had been directly in its course, Adelina and Martin could not have been more spontaneous in their rush toward her.

John Hullworthy was rooted to his place, rendered mute before the tide of destruction that threatened them,

but dully denying that this hideous idea could become a reality.

Then the loving heart of the Pepperdays' Aunt Addie was overcome by its weight of woe. No longer able to stand, she shrank away to hide her grief in the cushions of the divan.

Brewer's mind shot to Benny. What if—if she were speaking the truth, and the boy knew it! Would that account for his hysterical reticence? But was she? He forced himself to stand very still and hold his thoughts in command. To steady himself, he laid his hand on a chair back. Then he compelled his gaze to stay upon her pallid countenance.

All of a sudden into his consciousness there leaped one of those luminous intuitions, the like of which had guided him to truth when he had sought to solve almost unsolvable questions. Lady Pat was lying!

She had virtually given herself up for a deed that he was reasonably certain his own son had committed. To stand by and allow a woman to make such a claim, to keep silent even to save his idolized boy,—Great God, he could not be guilty of that! He sent a searching glance at Adelina. She was but a heap among the pillows. Then to the man standing near Patricia his gaze moved. Of them all Hullworthy's lean countenance held the least color, its extreme pallor accentuating his strong jawline.

As if she were coming out of a subconscious trance, Patricia sighed again and spoke:

"Oh, how have I lived with my Michael in prison—in that awful place for—for what I did myself!" She broke off, breathing spasmodically. "I don't know how I did it. I—I—"

Perplexed, she was floundering helplessly when Martin caught her darkly glowing eyes and held them. In those pools of stone-gray there shone a high resolution which

drew from him a smothered ejaculation. Human nature had always been an open book to him. He had turned its pages and read its problems as a boy recites two and two are four. So did he know the attributes of the God-head. In his sight Paddy Pepperday had suddenly become sanctified. On her pale face was stamped sublime sacrifice.

"I was cowardly and, oh, so terribly afraid," he heard her falter on. "When they accused Michael, I let them do it. I couldn't make myself say a word. I tried to. I—I think that was what made me so ill."

In order to shake off the yoke of Brewer's keen-eyed surveillance, she faced about and addressed the other man.

"I couldn't stand it any longer, Mr. Hullworthy! Of course, you can see I couldn't! Oh, it's haunted me for so many, many months!"

Instinctively she edged a step nearer him.

"You—you said you'd help my brother," she gulped. "You said you would!"

Her voice, trailing away as she repeated his reiterated promise, shook Hullworthy out of his impassivity. His position he shifted slightly but not his steady regard.

"You have no proof of this—this—this statement you've made; certainly you have not!" he said.

She swayed against him, and his arm went around her.

"Yes, I have," she contradicted, scarcely audible. "Yes, yes, I have."

His intimate knowledge of the details of the Pepperday case pressed upon him the fact that it was not impossible for her to have done what she had charged against herself. He was stabbed with an intolerable pain. Mightily he drove his brain to contradict itself and her.

"You're not telling the truth," he ejaculated.

To look into her face was impossible, for now her

head was on his breast. He was so tall, and she so short that he bent a little to catch her answer.

"Yes, yes, believe me," she breathed laboriously. "I am telling you the truth," and she repeated the words with stronger insistence.

"But you—you had no—motive," he stumbled. "What motive could you—you have had? Ah, you—you had none—none!"

"But I had," she contended. Please let me stand up straight. I'll try and tell it just as it was.—They weren't friends,—Michael and Arthur. Fatty hated my brother. He told me he was going to—to fix Michael. Oh, the King *would* run around with Babe Foster, and Fatty was in love with her himself. That night, after Martin took me home, I had to go back downstairs for—for something, and, when I went up again, I met Arthur in the hall. He stopped and said Mike wasn't treating him right. I begged him—"

"Where did you get the pencil?" Hullworthy demanded.

"He—had it,—Fatty," she quivered. "Before we started to quarrel, he asked me to give it to Michael."

Helplessness gripped Hullworthy. In a twinkling he realized that his interrogations were merely involving her more deeply. He wanted with all the force within him to snatch her up and bear her far beyond the reach of the legal vultures that would soon be wagging their bald heads over her.

When he silently placed her in a chair, she made no resistance but sat hunched over, her head bowed forward, paying no attention to Adelina's wild weeping.

Once before had Martin Brewer writhed in the grip of the Almighty God as he was writhing now. The love of truth sent up to his throat a confession which stuck there in a knotty lump. He stood on the very verge of shrieking out that his son was the criminal.

Delaying that avowal was the fear of what the words would bring down upon the boy's dear head. It huddled him weakly into himself. He no longer believed that every one was responsible for his own deeds. His son was not responsible. Benny had not had one-half a chance in the world. Benny was ill. Benny was a genius!

Slowly he advanced and stared down upon Patricia.

After a space she seemed to be aware of his nearness.

"I've been almost wild—thinking and thinking, dear Martin," she said in far-away tones. "It's been only to-day—now—that I've had the courage to speak."

Nevertheless, she wavered under his piercing eyes and felt a quick fear take possession of her.

"Martin," she begged, shuddering, "don't—don't look at me so. You frighten me!"

Sphinx-like in immobility and unresponsiveness, he might have been modeled from stone. The only sign of the battle within him was the radiance of his eyes.

"Martin," she repeated, rising suddenly, "Martin, dear!"

For an instant he allowed her to examine and cross-examine his set, mask-like face.

"You're a great actress, my Paddy," he said then in straight level tones. "By God, Broadway never saw anything like you to-day! But your story won't hold water, Lady Pat. You're trying to give Mike back to his mother. You intend saving her life by giving up your own, but you can't do it, for I won't let you. Not—by a damned sight!" He grasped her arm as she attempted to speak. "You're wrong, beastly wrong, my girl."

Sure now of the path he must henceforth tread, he wheeled around. Adelina was crouched on the divan, her face hidden in a pillow. In her he found nothing to meet him half-way. But Hullworthy — with one appraising glance he measured his enormous figure.

"You, sir, you," he boomed, "I imagine you have a wad of sense under your bonnet! Can't you see that this girl's been playing a part? A damned fine magnificent part, I grant you, but a part, just the same! She didn't kill Arthur Brown, and I'll prove it.

With extended right arm he advanced until a yardstick would have spanned the distance between him and the man he addressed.

"This," and his left hand touched his right, "this hand—this very fist—See it?" And he gripped his fingers until their knuckles showed white. "This hand—stabbed Fatty Funny Breeches!"

A scream that shuddered into a sobbing cry came from Adelina, but Martin gave her no heed.

"When I've explained," he said with heavy emphasis, "it won't be difficult for you to understand that this girl has lied—lied, I tell you! I went to Cavendish's twice the night Brown was murdered, once about one o'clock to take Lady Pat home and the second time—"

Speechless, Patricia gaped at him.

"I won't stand by and let you take my act on your shoulders, Paddy," he thundered passionately. "True, you'll wonder why in hell I didn't confess before. My boy was the reason! Every time I tried to tell it, I remembered him. He's as helpless as an angleworm. He hasn't a soul in the world to care for him but me. I didn't have the nerve, when Michael was arrested, to come forward and own up, but—but now you've forced me to it, Paddy."

Thrilled through to the very center of his being, Patrick O'Kelleron had listened to that violent confession with a sense of awe. Of all the people with whom he was acquainted, he placed Martin Brewer among the very highest. He remembered the man's incomparable work and then—then he withered under another memory.

That day when Martin had sent for him! His insistence that Michael Pepperday should not be electrocuted! He had always taken for granted that Brewer's emotion at that time was because of his love of the Pepperdays. Perhaps, not!

"What took you to Cavendish's the second time?" he demanded.

Grateful for the query that brought him to the meat of his story, Brewer's taut muscles relaxed a bit.

"I went there after my son," he answered promptly. "He was there, and I went to bring him away."

An ejaculation, involuntary, half-suppressed, from Patricia wheeled him about.

"I went to Cavendish's to bring him away, Lady Pat," he reiterated. "When I got home, about half-past one, Ben wasn't there. Jackson told me he had driven him down to Cavendish's. So I came down, and it was while I was there that the thing happened."

Patricia crashed back into the chair as though she had come in contact with a great fist. The large man before her grew so dim she could see but his outline. Her mind was refusing to countenance the image drawn upon it. Martin Brewer, the beloved of thousands, the slayer of Arthur Brown? No! Yet, so he had claimed! He had said it—he had owned to it!

"Did you see your son there?" put in Hullworthy sharply.

As if a memory insupportable, terrible, had come to him, Martin staggered back. He groaned aloud but regained a portion of his self-control and replied unsteadily:

"Yes, I did. Benny was with Brown, and they were quarreling. Brown was always tormenting the kid. I—I took Benny down to the car, and on the stairs he told me how Funny Breeches had called him a human corkscrew. I went back up to talk to Brown about it! God knows,

when I picked up Michael's pencil, I didn't intend using it—"

Then it all dawned upon Patricia, the meaning of that long speech. Every word burned her with the scorch of fire.

"Oh, he's telling what isn't true," she screamed, springing up. "Don't believe him, Mr. Hullworthy! I tell you, don't believe him!—Martin, you shan't save me that way. You shan't, Martin!—Benny was in my room when I got there, and he stayed with me almost two hours. He even went to sleep. Afterwards I sent him home myself. I put him in the taxi. That's why I went down-stairs. Oh, Martin, how splendid—how—splendid—you are! But you shan't save me that way!"

CHAPTER XLIII

THE blast of an automobile horn outside cut through the deadened hush of the room like a human voice. A boy passing along Park Avenue whistled shrilly, and mingling with his lilting jazz tune, came the jangle of the trademen's bell in the basement.

As the meaning of Patricia's vehement narration filtered through Martin's mind, a wave of relief swept over his soul, leaving him voiceless. As though petrified, he maintained his position, his lips slightly apart, his massive head thrown back with imperious command.

In her stormy, unblinking gray eyes was unvarnished truth. She knew whereof she had spoken, and Brewer was convinced.

In a few short sentences she had dispersed the hounds of the law from Benny's heels and reinstated him in the full, radiant light of innocence. Down went the wall of reserve between father and son. Away sped the months of the man's agony and suspense, and then there crept about his heart a joy in similitude to that rapturous day in which he had found peace before the model of "The Streams Make Glad."

Oh, the bitter hours he had wasted in begging God to be God, and then forgetting that the road to harmony could only be traveled in singleness of heart, with conscience clean! In tormenting fear he had shivered from the iteration of "Thy will be done!" to "My will be done—mine,—Martin Brewer's."

His will had been to shield Benny behind the prostrate head of Michael Pepperday, an effort as impossible as it was needless. He recollected with contrition how

reluctantly he had lent a hand to Patricia's insistent attempt to locate even a thread of evidence that would give her brother one wee chance for liberty.

Not so long as it takes to tell it, did he reman motionless, for Patricia voice broke into his profound preoccupation.

"Send for Benny, please," she entreated hoarsely. "I must see him. Go directly, and telephone him to come down, Mr. Hullworthy."

But, if he heard her frantic behest, John Hullworthy made no move to obey. He was very pale, nor did he appear to be aware of his surroundings. He was experiencing the actual operation of the law, "And they, twain, shall be one flesh." He was kneeling by her side in her Garden of Gethsemane. He was keeping step with her upon the pilgrimage she had chosen. He was prepared to go down into the valley of the shadow, if she elected, for he feared no evil. Selfless love sustained him.

Oddly abstracted, he appeared to Patricia withdrawn somehow,—in censure, perhaps! But what her friends might think or do must not be taken into consideration now. She flung around on Miss Pepperday.

"Please, please telephone for Benny this minute, Aunt Addie," she begged, hardly above a whisper.

To bring to fruition a wish of one of her beloved children had been Adelina's habit since she had gasped at the triplets on the day of their birth. With an appealing glance at Martin, she arose and for a moment hesitated.

"Hop in the car, and go get him, Addie," he directed grimly, and Adelina fluttered away.

Then for some unmeasured moments the three were begirt by a rare silence that seemed vocal with significance.

There shot in among Martin's reminiscences the

memory that Paddy Pepperday, in all her lovely girlhood, was a self-accused slayer. His smoldering eyes sought and found her. There she was, so very quiet. Her gray gaze seemed to be centered on nothing. Like himself, she was waiting for Benny. Tears came without warning to his lids. He still believed she was dreaming of bringing freedom to Michael in thrusting herself into the hands of the State. That would be unbearable!

"Paddy girl," he exclaimed in a voice rich with emotion.

She moved, looked in his direction, but he knew she did not see him.

The handkerchief between her slender fingers was in tatters, and it dangled at her side, making split strips of white over her dark skirt. She remained thus a moment, and in that speck of time Martin went close to her.

"Little Pat, child," he murmured, stung to the quick by her tragic stillness.

Drawing a long breath, she tottered into the arms he held out, and there against his broad breast her weary head rested. What a dot of a girl she was, not an inch too tall to walk under his arm. Yet those young shoulders were willingly carrying a burden a man would have shuddered from under if possible. In a flash it came to him that he alone might make an appeal which would strike home to her tender heart.

"'There is a River the Streams whereof shall make Glad the City of God,' my Pat," he quoted reverently, "and you, dear, are Truth—God's Truth—you—you, child!"

Michael, the King of the Pepperdays, beautiful David of Judea! And Yum-yum's favorite song! He could not have quoted words that would have more definitely confirmed her purpose.

"I want to tell you something about my husband, Martin," she began without lifting her head. "He—

Patrick O'Kelleron—discovered when we were in Montana it was I who had—had—” she was endeavoring to pronounce the word “killed,” but her slender throat would not emit it. “Patrick knew Michael hadn’t—hadn’t— He found out that—it was I.”

Although she had spoken with extreme effort, every syllable was heard. With this she had caught Martin in an unguarded moment. Never for a second had he anticipated that she possessed a clinching argument which could obscure the way along which he had intended to lead her. He went dumb as though he had suddenly lost his tongue.

If he had been less distraught and strengthless, he would never have allowed a strange man to touch her. But John Hullworthy had whipped her out of his embrace before he realized what was happening. He saw the strong hands gripping her shaking shoulders. He saw her lift an agonized face to the countenance above her.

“Tell me what your husband said,” came from between Hullworthy’s teeth.

“He, my husband, suspected me for a long time,” her white lips spoke. “Then one morning he—he accused me and said he was going to bring me east. Then—then—I ran away—and he— Please help me—me—”

Before she could finish her appeal, her voice died out. As she watched the tall man, one set of his fingers went to his head, and when they came away there were clutched between them a black wig and a pair of horn spectacles.

Fascinated, she contemplated the metamorphosis. The laughing countenance she had glimpsed in Blackberry Lane, the joyous aspect of her lover, Stephen, and the strong lineaments of her husband, Patrick,— all were there, but transfigured and sanctified, as though Yum-yum’s King of Glory had come down to earth to sustain her.

"I—I am your husband, Patrick O'Kelleron, Patricia," dropped in husky accents into her upturned face.

Silent shudder after silent shudder swayed her. And, when she sagged into Patrick O'Kelleron's arms, she was unconscious.

CHAPTER XLIV

DESPOILED of his wig and spectacles, John Hullworthy, perforce, had gone the way of all flesh. His life had been short, and, if not merry, it certainly had been packed full of great emotions. Like the gallant knights of old, he had lived but to serve his "ladye fayre" and by single-hearted devotion had won an imperishable place in her memory.

When Patricia had fainted, Patrick O'Kelleron had not delayed for further explanation to Martin Brewer but had carried her to her chamber. There he had hung over her in excruciating anxiety until Doctor Watkins had ordered him out.

Fortunately, else Martin might also have lost his wits before the miracle of Patrick's resurrection, Frank Shevlin appeared to reassure and explain.

In the meantime, like a great watchdog, O'Kelleron paced to and fro before Patricia's door, taking no count of the seconds as they lengthened into minutes and the slow minutes into an hour. He heard Adelina Pepperday and Benny Brewer come in, heard them join Brewer and Shevlin in the drawing-room, and paused in his bitter musings long enough to picture their amazement when they learned of his reappearance.

As he walked, he thought, at first inconsecutively, but more and more clearly, as he strove earnestly for the truth of things. With terrible insistence the questions, "Why?" and "What can I do about it?" confronted him.

Some one had said, and the saying had impressed him then and recurred to him now, that a man's experience was the externalization of his own thinking. He told

himself sardonically that his mind must be a pretty mess, if that were so. Vigorously he repudiated the imputation that he was responsible for the calamities that had fallen upon him, but again and again he returned to that claim.

So inextricably were his own affairs involved in the Pepperdays' that naturally enough they crowded upon his attention. His prosecution of Michael had been greatly commended and was regarded as a brilliant legal achievement. Yet, it had resulted in incalculable harm, not to Michael only, but to every one Michael's life had touched, and a full measure of disaster had rebounded on himself. Could that be right in principle and practice, he questioned, that which had produced only baneful consequences?

Arraigned at the bar of his own conscience, he found no exceptions to the law, "Thou shalt not kill!"

That law he had thundered at Michael, and all the time he himself had been striving and urging others to kill Michael! In the very face of his denunciation Madison Pepperday had fallen dead, a victim of his malicious efforts!

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord," hushed his every time-worn argument, based on social necessity to protect life and property.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged."

The slayer needs must suffer punishment for his crime, but where did Patrick O'Kelleron receive his warrant to inflict the penalty?

Staggered at the revolutionary conclusion he saw himself approaching, he stopped stock still while he followed his reason in its logical progress.

The killing of Arthur Brown was one thing. With that he had nothing to do.

The attempt to kill Michael Pepperday — that

attempt had been his deliberate act! To it he had given the whole force of his personality, every resource of his and of the State's that he could muster. In the light of his present conviction that the lad was innocent, he shuddered with horror at the thought of his own predicament had his effort been successful.

He had served the law of hate, of reprisal and resentment, and he had received the rewards of that service!

Did it make no difference that he had acted conscientiously and in accordance with the ordinary opinion of mankind?

In a hot sweat of intense concentration, he dug deeper into consciousness. As one gropes awkwardly in a dark house until his finger touches an electric switch, and lo, all is brightness and light, so O'Kelleron fumbled about. Then there came to him illumination. In quick succession memory turned the spotlight upon the teachings of Him who spoke as never man spake, until he arrived at Paul's lucid corollary, "Love is the fulfilling of the law."

Ah, that was it! Love for God and man! Perfect love in which there is no fear!

Sustained by the self-forgetfulness of that love, his wife had not hesitated even when the path led through shame and disgrace to an ignoble death! Her example was at once a lesson and an inspiration. United in spirit with her, in the self-revelation of loving humility, he was in the midst of his thanksgiving for the teaching vouchsafed him when he heard the sound of weeping. It was a call which he was quick to answer.

He walked softly to the stairs, where he paused and listened. Then he mounted them. The crying had ceased, and no one was in sight when he reached the third floor.

Then a long sigh from the becurtained cozy-corner under the stairs which led to the servants' quarters was followed by a voice, subdued and quaking.

"Oh, George, if I only dast tell Miss Paddy her Michael didn't stick that pencil in Fatty Funny Breeches!" he heard. "Fan's sick all over worryin' about it."

"Billy's a crook, Fan," came in hoarse tones.

Instinctively Patrick hushed even his breathing. Without looking, he knew that the invisible speakers were the girl and the bird who had scurried through the reception hall the day before, when he and Patricia were descending the stairs, and the words she had uttered, stiffened every muscle in his body.

"Polly wants a cracker."

"Not a snitch will you get to eat to-day, George," sounded forth the girl's voice. "Ain't you ashamed of yourself thinkin' of your stomach when poor little Paddy Pepperday—"

The voice ceased, and the speaker coughed miserable, short, hacking coughs, as though strong emotion had choked her.

Then, pulling aside the curtains, Patrick O'Kelleron looked down upon Fancy Cavendish, extended full length on the plush cushions. Until then he had not recalled that she was one of the witnesses at young Pepperday's trial. He recollected now what a struggle he had had to drag anything from her unwilling lips. At length he had passed over her sullen silence as belonging to one afflicted with a feeble mind.

Through the dim light he could see that she had centered upon him a vacant, unwinking stare.

Then of a sudden she scrambled to a sitting position, and the bird fluttered his wings and uttered a squawk. Still keeping her eyes upon him, she clutched hold of the parrot and thrust him under a cushion, her face drab with terror.

"Cat's whiskers!" she gulped. "Where'd you come from, Mr. Blake?"

Of all the aliases that it had been his fortune to assume, this one, thrust upon him by a half-witted girl, was the most incongruous. Yet, Edward Blake had been mistaken for him by wiser ones than she, and his confined body was in the O'Kelleron vault. One forefinger went to her mouth.

"Shush," she hissed, "I've never told a soul about Fatty Funny Breeches, so—so don't beat me."

Into the inclosure O'Kelleron stepped and dropped the curtains behind him. The small recess was dimly shadowed, but he could make out the girl's body crouched against the wall. Her head was swaying back and forth like the pendulum of a clock.

"Ma's jaw wags," came in smothered tones from under the pillow. "Gold pencil, Fan!"

"Oh, you heard that, didn't you, Mr. Blake?" Fan shivered. "George's a cussed mean boy. Most times I'm with little Paddy I hold his mouth shut with my fingers. Once he yapped, 'Gold pencil!' and she went white like grease." Then Fancy groaned audibly. "I bet Billy Foster sent you after George and me."

"No, he didn't. I came myself," he denied, "and I heard what you said to your parrot."

"But I've never said anything to anybody about it but George, Mr. Blake," she whispered. "You can believe me, you can! And I wouldn't to him if he could tell it."

How to deal with this unfortunate child was a riddle Patrick O'Kelleron could not solve in a minute; so he remained silent.

"Your bird talks too much," he ventured presently.

She went perfectly rigid, gasping for breath.

"I know it! I know it!" she agreed hopelessly. "He's just what ma says he is—a plain, damned fool. Sometimes he can't seem to understand a word I tell him. — When'd you get back?"

"To-day," answered O'Kelleron, "a little while ago."

"Have you been over to see Billy Foster?"

"Not yet!"

"I'm glad to see you first," she confided with a sigh of relief, "awful glad!—Billy's mad at me and George, and he said you would be, too. He said, Billy did, that you'd chop off my legs and hack my head square off."

"What did you do to make him say that?" he questioned.

"Well—it ain't me as much as 'tis George," she explained in a whisper. "I've most knocked the stuffin' out of that bird, but he will yell about that pencil. Billy said I learned it to him, but I can't remember when I did.—Ma says George speaks the truth when he keeps sayin' Billy's a crook. I guess he is." Her head sank wearily against her shoulder. "I'm worn out, clean through to my bones, tryin' not to tell Miss Paddy that Mike was with Milly Foster all that night, that he wasn't even in sight when Funny Breeches was hit. Oh, me, oh, my! I'd give her everything I've got outside of George to tell 'er Mike hadn't ought to be in jail."

Alternating laughs and cries issued from her lips. O'Kelleron bent forward and touched her arm, and she shivered violently.

"Didn't I tell just what all of you said I should in court?" she pleaded, anxious for a word of commendation. "Wasn't I careful not to let 'em snitch a word that'd take the blame off'n Mike?"

"Yes, yés, you were; you certainly were," he acknowledged, every nerve in his body on the jump. "But, Fancy, Foster lied when he told you I'd hurt you! You surely didn't believe it?"

"Yes, sir, I did, and how could I help it? The marks you made on me that night, when I said I wouldn't help blame Michael, stayed for weeks. Ma saw 'em, and I

told her George did it.—And the way you went after Miss Milly, when you said she must keep Mike with 'er till morning, was something scand'lous." As though the affair were nothing new, she went on, "Lordy, how you acted after you and Bill lugged that big whale of a Fatty out dead and dumped 'im in the hall!"

"Well, it's over now, child," soothed O'Kelleron, "and I regret I was so harsh.—Have you seen Billy Foster lately?"

When she shuddered, he knew she had.

"Yes, sir, to-day," she admitted, "and my Polly hates him worsen dirt. They had an awful fight this afternoon. And every tail feather is out of my poor bird. If I hadn't bit a piece off'n Billy's arm, he'd a had George's neck twisted. You see Billy thought all the time George was dead. Until I brung him here, I had 'im hid up at Benny Brewer's house, and to-day I forgot about that and took 'im to ma's to see if I'd lammed the life out of Mr. Clark with the tongs.—Oh, dear, my head aches fit to split."

Again Patrick O'Kelleron laid his hand on her arm, but, somehow, she seemed less frantically afraid.

"Poor, little, exhausted mite! Come over here, next to me," he begged. "No matter what Foster said, I shan't hurt you."

"Won't you hurt George, either?" she faltered.

"No, no, of course, I won't! There! Now, rest a minute, and don't cry any more. After a while I'll go get you something that will take away your headache."

Fancy collapsed against his arm. Edward Blake had been kept so constantly before her as a destroying power that it had never occurred to her that he could be other than brutal. To feel that neither she nor George need fear for their lives was, as she whispered to herself, "A blessed relief!"

Finally she began once more:

"Bridget told me Paddy Pepperday fainted away while I was at ma's, because Mike's bein' kept up the river. I suppose you wouldn't dare tell 'er he never killed Funny Breeches?"

"I will," gasped O'Kelleron. "Yes, I will — right away!"

For a long time she scratched her head in meditation, and the man waited in a torture of impatience, difficult to control.

"I can't see how you can do it," she uttered presently with a spasm of trembling. "Billy and his sister are always afraid I'll squeal, but, of course, I wouldn't. —While you've been gone, I've did everything Billy's asked me because you said I must. Only I couldn't pull off George's head just because he knew more'n he ought to! Why, I traipsed way over to ma's last night to tell Bill Miss Paddy was goin' away to-day and Mr. Clark could come along and get his wife."

Although every muscle in Patrick O'Kelleron's body became rigid, he merely drew the frail young speaker closer to him.

"Oh, I'm so scared," she whimpered. "I guess you'll get pinched, and so'll all the rest of us—eh?"

"Never mind that, little one," fell from O'Kelleron's tight lips.

As yet she had not spoken the guilty man's name, and he simply ached to ask her questions.

"Did you hurt Mr. Clark much?" he queried.

"Yes, he's in bed," she returned, "and Aunt Addie broke his beautiful nose. He was always proud of that face of his'n, was Mr. Clark. Milly Foster laughed at him and said his mug looked like a busted ripe tomato, and you could hear 'im groan all over the place. Ma says, ma does, that it's hellish luck to have to run an

actors' lodgin' house, and so 'tis! There's always some-one sick or drunk around."

O'Kelleron had a sudden, hysterical desire to laugh.

"I only hit him because he poked Yum-yum," Fancy trailed on. "I'd thought all the time, till I saw him do that, he wasn't so bad. He said his wife wanted to live with him, and other folks wouldn't let him even see 'er. Billy said, if I didn't keep watch and tell 'im when she was alone, he'd tell you about it when you got back, and you'd put me right where you put Funny Breeches,—right in the grave!"

All in a tremble, she sat up.

"But if you tell 'em you stuck Mike Pepperday's pencil clean through Funny Breeches— You must've been soused proper, or you wouldn't have stabbed him just because he said you cheated in a card game. I ain't supposed to tell it, but Billy says you had an ace hid out."

Stinging tears blinded O'Kelleron's eyes. He got to his feet and lifted Fancy bodily into his arms and walked into the hall. So utterly weary was the girl that she did not raise her head as he bore her swiftly into his own suite of rooms. Possessed of a single idea, he gave no attention to the familiar surroundings, although this had been his sanctum ever since he was a young lad. He placed Fancy in a chair and sat down beside her.

Then she sighed and looked at him. In three or four seconds she changed from a limp, tired child into a wild-eyed, startled creature.

"Why, you ain't Mr. Blake," she cried, and then she clapped both hands to her mouth.

"Mr. Blake is dead," he said. "He's dead and buried."

Her fingers went tremblingly to her brow. An expression of perplexity came into her light eyes as she scrutinized his face minutely.

"I've seen you before somewhere, but I can't think of the place now," she whined. "Oh, sir, please slip me your name before I go batty."

In the full realization that this child-woman held in her thin, small hands the only key that would open Sing Sing prison for Michael Pepperday, he made no answer.

As though she remembered his kindness under the stairs, she did not shrink when his large hand smoothed over her hair.

"I'm Paddy Pepperday's husband," he answered quietly at last.

Fancy's posture changed in a twinkling. She poised on the edge of her chair as though she were about to fly away any instant.

"That can't be," she contradicted slowly. "It can't be! Billy Foster told me how tickled he was because Miss Paddy's man was all blowed to pieces." She paused and then crumpled back with a sharp cry. "Now, I get it! Now, I've got it! You're the man I lied to in court."

"I'm Paddy Pepperday's husband, just the same," he repeated, "and it's most wicked to keep Michael shut up."

"That's so," she broke in passionately, "but I was so scared of Mr. Blake and Billy, or he'd been out long ago.—Say, are—are—are you cryin'? My Lordy me, don't do that!"

And as true as the world stands, there were large tears rolling down Patrick O'Kelleron's cheeks.

"I wonder how much you—you love little Paddy Pepperday," he groaned.

"Oh, more'n any one else in this blasted old world," she asserted promptly. "Ma threw it in my face this very day that I loved Miss Paddy's little finger better'n I did her whole body, and I do, sir, oh, I do."

"And no one can help her but you, dear child! If—if you—really care for her that much—"

Suddenly his face dropped into his hands.

So long had Fancy been mother to George that maternal love was strong within her. At the sight of the man's shaking shoulders, she slipped to her knees beside him, and one of her slender arms fell around his neck.

"Fan's here to help you, mister," she comforted. "Don't cry any more, please don't! Fan's goin' to take care of you and Miss Paddy just like she takes care of George. And I'll go down with you to the court any time you say and tell the whole damn, nasty story just as 'twas!"

"Oh, God, how I thank Thee," came in one sharp ejaculation from Patrick O'Kelleron, and on the finish of that prayer he snatched Fancy into his arms, and away they went to Martin Brewer and Frank Shevlin.

CHAPTER XLV

IN Patricia's darkened chamber Doctor Watkins was seated beside her, his finger on her pulse. She lay very quiet, studying his face.

"I'll wager you feel better after that sleep, young lady," he remarked. "You've been going it for hours. I'd almost come to the conclusion that you intended sleeping through the night."

"You made me swallow something bitter," she began.

"I surely did," he interrupted. "The state of nerves you were in after your aunt had told you about your brother needed something, my dear."

"But it will cheer you up to know," he added, "that, while you were snoozing, your mother has been improving by leaps and strides."

"I'm very glad," she murmured, "and, oh, what about my brother, Michael?"

"He'll be here to-morrow on the jump, and every one's shouting with glee," proceeded the doctor, smiling. "A man named Foster and his sister have been arrested and have confessed their part in the Brown murder. Of course, Edward Blake's death—"

That Adelina Pepperday had not omitted this ghastly detail was evidenced by Patricia's involuntary gesture of repugnance.

Quick to take the hint, the doctor picked out a pleasanter subject.

"Frank Shevlin is with the District Attorney, arranging things for Michael's release. All your friends are holding their breaths till you finish your nap to have a regular jollification."

There was another name on her lips, but she had not the courage to pronounce it.

"John Hullworthy is Stephen. My husband is alive, and it isn't possible that he loves me," stormed her soul with a faintness that told Doctor Watkins without words what a bad time she was having.

"Listen to me, my dear," he said solemnly. "If you're going to cry, I shall have to scold you. Then I won't have time to tell you all the good news."

"Oh, doctor dear," she whispered wofully, "I just can't help it; I can't help crying.—Please forgive me!"

"I will, if you'll stop," was the paradoxical rejoinder.

"There, wipe your eyes, and be a good girl. I don't want to have to give you any more medicine.

"Why, Nancy Clark has insisted for more than an hour that I wake you up. She wants to tell you that Alexander is dead.—There! I popped that out pretty sudden, didn't I? My wife's always taking me to task because I can't think twice before I speak once.—But never mind! That's the only bit of calamitous news I have. Alex is better off where he is! When they arrested Miss Foster, he shot himself. Nancy says it's the only real favor he's conferred on her since she married him."

After fumbling fussily in his pocket for a moment, he extended a sealed envelope.

"Mr. Brewer left this note for you when he and your aunt left late this afternoon," he observed. "Here, I'll rip it open."

When he had handed her the inclosure, she was forced to dab her eyes several times before she could make out anything but blurred lines across the paper. Then she read:

"Dear little pal:

"Congratulations on our not breaking into jail!

"Forgive me for not asking your consent before I take your Aunt Addie off and marry her, but you're sound asleep; so I can't.

"I know that I have won the noblest woman in the world. When I think of my cowardly treatment of her, my Addie, I am covered with shame, and this confession gives me the opportunity to say further, Paddy, that your womanly treatment of Benny at Cavendish's Labor Day night stands out in the child's mind with startling clearness.

"He and I have talked the thing over from beginning to end. Poor little kid! He was as solemn and soulful as a time-honored saint when he told me that you had promised each other never to tell any one, not even me, that he went to see you, and that, as long as he lived, he would hold those two hours with you as the most sacred of his life. He is quite reconciled to an operation in the fall and sends congratulations and love to you.

"Addie assures me that you will forgive my cowardice without my asking it, but, of course, I cannot close this without imploring you to consider my profound love for my boy. It's unnecessary for me to say that I regret my weakness, and that I look forward to hearing from your own lips that you have forgiven it.

"I wouldn't have a minute to get married for the next week if I wrote what I think of Patrick O'Kelleron. I don't need to. You've lived with him and know.

"Oh, my Paddy beautiful, how joyful I am for you, for all of us.

"Affectionately,

"MARTIN"

Below the signature was a hasty scrawl in Adelina's handwriting.

"Darling:

"I'm taking Benny and Fancy and George while I'm getting married to Martin. They are going to stand up with us.

"Then we'll go to Balmville to-night because I'm worried about Miranda. But we'll be back to-morrow to see Michael. Mr. Shevlin says he'll have him home free by noon.

"Dear, I'm such a happy woman! Fancy is wriggling with excitement to get away, and Martin is, too, for that matter, so I'll stop. Your mother is as quiet as a lamb and all eyes for the coming of our dear boy. I wanted Martin to wait to be married till you could go with us, but no, he says we've waited too long already.

"Fondest love,

"AUNT ADDIE.

"P. S. I'm borrowing your hat with the flowers on it, the red flowers. I don't want Martin to think he's marrying his grandmother, so I'll leave my old bonnet here. Martin says I look like you in the hat."

The paper slipped from Patricia's hand. She was glad for Aunt Addie and Martin. If two people ever deserved to be happy, they did!

"Brace up, little lady," advised the doctor. "That was a miracle served up on your table, my dear. I mean your husband—"

Ah, that was true, and Patrick O'Kelleron was her husband. The memory of him in Blackberry Lane rose up before her. Her happy days in Butte sped on quickly to the hour in Idaho Falls when she herself had made it

impossible for him to hold her in esteem. Without that, his love had perished, of course!

To-morrow she would have to begin life over again. To-morrow would bring a greater problem to solve than had ever been presented to her. As soon as Yum-yum could be moved, she would leave Patrick's home. But where in the world would she be able to tolerate life without Stephen? She was so busy reconstructing images that tortured her that she did not hear the door open, nor did she notice that somebody tiptoed in.

But Archibald Watkins quickly recognized the intruder and as quickly got to his feet.

"Ha," he coughed so strangely in a long-drawn-out emphasis that Patricia looked at him. Archibald had often wished that the earth would swallow him up before he grew too old to appreciate true love! Romantic old soul! Never could that calamity happen! The love of love was the basic principle of his life. He was trying to frame a befitting speech for this auspicious occasion.

When Patricia saw Patrick, she stared at him, extremely pale.

Red-brown eyes, instead of round, dark glasses, searched her with insistent gaze, and in that pulsing silence did she fully realize her love for the man whom she felt sure she had lost.

Doctor Watkins "ha-ed" more loudly than before. He had a mouthful of oratory, all about married felicity, when he became suddenly embarrassed.

"I'm at my wits' end," flashed into his head, but he did not say it. No man could be at the end of his wits in the presence of such a splendid pair of lovers. He would beam upon them—add a blessing and— He did manage to smile, and, of course, the smile opened his mouth.

"It's a long lane—that has no turning, little lady," he ejaculated and bolted out of the room.

Then, step after step, and slow steps they were, brought Patrick O'Kelleron nearer and nearer.

"I know what you've come to say," she contrived to stammer, "but I wish you wouldn't—now!"

Utterly fatigued, and so ashamed, she hid her face in the pillow. Her shoulders gleamed white through the thin silk of her nightrobe, and a tantalizing curl embraced a small ear.

"But I must say it, Patricia," he insisted with the Hull-worthy huskiness.

"Then I'll get up immediately—if you'll please go out," with a small sob.

"But why should I leave my wife even for a minute, after all I've been through without her?" he cried. "I shan't go away! So there!"

The finish of his words was but a boyish spurt of impatience, and Patricia, thinking she understood, passed it over.

"Oh, I'm not your wife any longer," she wailed from the folds of white linen. "A wife—why, a wife isn't the kind of a woman I am. A wife—a wife wouldn't do what I did—in—Montana."

To see such a man as Patrick O'Kelleron, a man whose jaw seemed chiseled from steel, tremble like a child, was pathetic, indeed. There had been small hope in her words that grew to greater proportions during his hesitation.

Suddenly he bent and slipped his arm around her and drew her dark head to his breast and held it there.

"Barney told me how you suffered over your father, and it was appalling," he whispered brokenly. "Oh, my birdie, don't you love me—even a little bit?"

The flower of love ventured to unfold a few more petals. She raised her head and looked at him.

"Stephen," she faltered, "Stephen! Do you mean you forgive me? Oh, do you mean that you want me—back?"

Boyish tears gathered in O'Kelleron's eyes.

"Want you? I shan't even try to live without you!" he exclaimed. "My Patricia,—my wife, my darlingest dear! Oh, please try and love me!"

Then two slender arms went up and around his neck.

"I don't need to try," she sighed blissfully, and a silence, deep and unspeakably sweet, fell upon them.

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